PAM DECIDES

BETTINA VON HUTTEN

"'IS SHE—BIG FOR HER AGE?' HE ASKED, GRAVELY"

PAM DECIDES

A Sequel to "Pam"

By BETTINA von HUTTEN

Author of
"Our Lady of the Beeches," "Violette," etc.

With Four Illustrations
By B. MARTIN JUSTICE

A. L. BURT COMPANY, Publishers
NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1906, BY

BETTINA VON HUTTEN

All Rights Reserved

Published, April, 1906

To those who understood and liked Pam and have asked me what happened to her, I dedicate this conclusion of her story.

B. v. H.

STEINBACH,

November 9, 1905

SYNOPSIS

FOR THOSE TO WHOM, AS YET, PAM IS A STRANGER.

"There is only one thing that makes a woman's life happy, and that is the thing she took. And having taken it and found it better than all the rest put together, would you have her pretend to be sorry?"—PAM.

Although many years have passed since her elopement with the celebrated tenor, "Guy Sacheverel," the daughter of Lord Yeoland, of Monks' Yeoland, has never regretted the step that brought sorrow, not only to an adoring father, but also to the singer's deserted wife, Mrs. Kennedy. Nor, would Pauline Yeoland ever consent to adopt any of the subterfuges customary with people similarly placed; but insisted on being addressed by her baptismal name. Furthermore, the true situation, together with the reasons therefor, was not withheld from their child Pam, who accordingly, when questioned as to her name, would reply ingenuously: "Just Pamela. It appears that children whose parents are not married, have only one name."

Yet, notwithstanding the general disbelief in the permanency of love under such conditions, the life of her parents in the "Villa Arcadie," in Southern Italy, continued to contain a happiness so great that the child was always contrasting it with that of those in the married state, and deducing therefrom, with the incontrovertible logic of youth, that necessarily, the cause of their unhappiness must be the marriage rite. But obviously, the attractions of such a ménage appealed more especially to the brilliant laxists sojourning on these shores; and among those to enjoy its hospitality were: Charnley Burke, an Australian—afterwards devoted to Pam—and the celebrated actress, Mde. Ravoglia, whose friendship lasted through life, and who bequeathed all of her jewelry to the young girl.

In due course, the steward Cazalet comes from Monks' Yeoland to fetch Pam for a visit to his Lordship; and accompanied by her nurse Pilgrim, she goes there and meets her cousins Evelyn—afterwards Lady Chesney—and Ratty, who promptly falls in love with her. Also, she makes the acquaintance of other old friends of her

grandfather, including the Duchess of Wight and her daughter, Lady Henrietta Shanklin. Pam and G.F. (as she affectionately calls her grandfather) are becoming great friends when two invitations are received by her: one to visit the Duchess; the other, to Pam's consternation, from Mrs. Kennedy, whose health is fast failing, and who is begging for a sight of the child of her husband. Lord Yeoland insists upon her acceptance of that of the Duchess; but Pam, despite his threats of disownment, chooses to visit her "father's wife." On the way there, Pam meets James Peele, a brilliant member of Parliament, and whom, at her grandfather's house, she has overheard making a proposal of marriage to Lady Henrietta. The home of Peele and that of Mrs. Kennedy are in the same village. Consequently, the man and girl are thrown much together until the death of Mrs. Kennedy, who, dying, has extorted a solemn promise from Pam to induce her parents to marry—a promise which was afterwards fulfilled.

Following this crisis, Pam is caught in a thunderstorm. For shelter she goes to Peele's house, and terribly frightened, she rushes into his arms, where she is discovered by Charnley Burke, who, coming to the village for the purpose of asking her to become his wife, has followed her there through the storm. Misunderstanding an innocent situation and wild with jealousy, he denounces her with bitter words, leaves the house and soon after sails for Australia.

Once more, Pam is in her beloved Arcadia, with Peele trying to persuade her to allow him to break his engagement with Lady Henrietta and marry her. But although Pam acknowledges her love, and gladly will go anywhere with him, her old objection to marriage remains paramount. For the moment, all that is best of manhood in Peele rises to combat, unsuccessfully, her folly. Yet, later on, when her parents are in Japan and her grandfather has died, neglecting to alter his will and leaving her practically penniless, Peele, apparently acquiescent, proposes that she shall go with him to South Africa. The girl joyfully accepts and they are perfecting their plans when, fortunately, his brutal selfishness is revealed to her; for he has the effrontery to contend that, before their flight, his career demands marriage with Lady Henrietta. Pam dismisses him forever, as she imagines, but in her heart has already forgiven the seemingly repentant man. Then, immediately, together with her old nurse Pilgrim, she sets out to make her living, in accordance with one of her sayings:

"There is no ready-made position for me in the world, so I shall, thank God, be able to make my own position."

PAM DECIDES

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

PAMELA YEOLAND awoke on the morning of her twenty-seventh birthday on the third floor of a Bloomsbury boarding-house. Yawning luxuriously, she turned over, rubbed her eyes, and then lay, her head on one arm, gazing at a chest of drawers that, flattered by the faint light into something like an appearance of respectability, chanced to block her line of vision.

And as she lay there, lazily enjoying the magic comfort of one's last half-hour in bed on a cold November morning, the ghosts of her seven last birthdays trooped staidly before her mental eyes.

The preceding one had been spent in a nearly similar establishment on the opposite side of the same street; the two before it in a temperance hotel in Montague Place; then came one in Guilford Street; two in Henrietta Street, Cavendish Square, in lodgings that seemed, thus seen by the blazing torch of contrast, palatial, as she recalled them.

The birthday before these two had been passed at an hotel near Paddington, and at the memory of it, softened and blurred as it had become with the passing of the years, the girl shivered uneasily in her bed and frowned, for it had been a very dreadful day.

But beyond it, dwindling down to a vague recollection of

pink cakes and burning candles, much be-frilled wax children, and parental embraces, stretched many more little birthdays, all of them happy ones.

The earliest she could remember was in Rome and the cake alone was distinct; then came several more in Italy, one in Florence, when her father had bought her a string of pink corals on the Goldsmiths' Bridge, one in some small city when, being afflicted with the mumps, she had been most miserable, though exceptionally fêted and cossetted. And then, as the anniversaries marched sedately towards that awful one in London, came one in Paris, two by the sea,—a blue southern sea,—and one most dear at Monks' Yeoland, when her grandfather had been alive. And this was number twenty-seven, then.

The ochre-coloured daylight, pressing in at the two windows, brought into slowly increasing distinctness the maps of fabulous lands that Time, by the means of cracks and tears, had produced on the dingy blinds, and revealed more plainly the sordid ugliness of the room. Relentlessly day withdrew from the worn carpet, the cheap brown bedstead and chairs, the flyblown picture-frames within which the pictures seemed to shrink shamefacedly, the kindly veil night had spread over them; the cracks in the discoloured ceiling reappeared, the spider-web that had adorned one corner of it for many months, the strange monster on the hearth-rug, the much-mended tin bath behind the table.

Everything miserably sordid, ugly, and depressing, though showing in one or two objects and arrangements an attempt at comfort.

The girl in the bed, after a whimsical glance at her surroundings, shrugged her thin shoulders and, tossing back the long dark hair that billowed about her face, sneezed violently.

Then, as she rummaged under despondently featherless pillows for her handkerchief, she said aloud to herself, *"Salute, mia cara, e mille auguri!"*

Having thus congratulated herself on the anniversary of her birth, she looked at her watch, and with a last shiver on the brink of the cold room, sprang up, set a match to the meagrely-laid fire, and a few minutes later was making a funny little unmusical noise that was the nearest to singing that she had ever been able to compass, as she went about her simple toilet.

She was nearly dressed when immediately following a single knock the door opened and a grimy maid-servant appeared, bearing a box and some letters. "Oh, Miss Yeoland, jis' look! It's from the country,—and four letters! Oh, Miss Yeoland, did you write? The candle's burnt down, I see——"

Pam twisted her thick rope of hair into a flat coil on her head, and pinned it firmly with some big pins. Then, glancing at a pile of closely-written sheets of foolscap on the table, nodded.

"Yes, I wrote till nearly one. The Duke *is* going to run off with her, just as you suggested, and poor Sir Lancelot nearly goes out of his wits. His sufferings, Mildred," she added, solemnly, "are something terrific!"

The maid-of-all-work clasped her unappetising-looking

hands in excited ecstasy. "Oh, Miss Yeoland! But she does escaipe, doesn't she? 'E must suffer something crool, but she *does* escaipe!"

Pam, who had opened a letter, nodded absently. "Oh yes, she escapes," she returned; "oh dear, yes. There's a rope-ladder, and a faithful retainer, and—and things like that,—I say, Mildred, open the box, will you?"

A minute later the room was sweet with the luxurious scent of hot-house flowers, and Pam stood holding a spray of stephanotis to her face, her eyes bright with pleasure. There were roses, bits of heliotrope, and violets. And they came from one who had always been her friend.

Her imagination, through long training, was able to bring as if before her very eyes the things of which she thought, and now she was seeing an old house in the country, soft, green lawns, tall trees, most of them old oaks, brown in the late autumn, bright windows, an ancient ruin covered with ivy, and then, off to the left, where her material eyes could not have seen them had she stood whence she saw the ruin and the house-front, the gleaming line of hot- and green-houses from which the flowers had come.

"Oh, Miss,—do mike 'im, the dook, send 'er flowers like these 'ere white ones!"

Positively open-mouthed, Mildred stood gazing and sniffing. Pam started. "Yes, Mildred, I will," she said; "and now you may go." Taking a white rose, a bit of Cape jessamine and a sprig of heliotrope she put them into the other girl's dingy hand, and with an incoherent "Oh Miss, thank you," Mildred, pathetic possessor of a beautiful name,

went pounding down the stairs, nearly as much surprised as if someone had plucked a star for her.

After a moment Pam sat down and re-read her letter.

"Monks' Yeoland, November 13."

"MY DEAR MISS PAM:—

"Another year has passed by, and we are all just so much older. My dear young lady, I wish you many happy returns of the day. I can hardly realise that you are seven-and-twenty. That it is really seventeen years since I rang at your father's door, there by the sea, and you opened it, your monkey in your arms. I remember it all so well,—so well. Indeed, now that I am so old, I find I remember best the things of long ago. I can positively smell the heliotrope that grew all over in such abundance, and you as you were then, with your big eyes, and your big coil of hair, I recall better than I can the lovely young lady I saw three years ago in London! I am so sorry to hear that poor Jane has been so ill, and trust that she is now quite well again.

"His Lordship asked most kindly for you the other day. His Lordship is most kind always, but times have sadly changed for me since your dear grandfather's death. If all one's friends lived, old age would not be sad at all, I sometimes think. I am glad that you have seen Lady Chesney. Please give her my respects and regards.

"In the hope that these flowers, the gift of Mr. M'Whirter, will please you, he begs me to send you his respects.

"I beg you to send my kindest regards and respects to

Mr. and Mrs. Sacheverel, when you write, and I am, r
dear Miss Pam,

"Your affectionate and faithful serv't,

"CHRISTOPHER CAZALET."

Pam folded the letter, her eyes wet. "Dear old Cazz
I wish I could see him! What an old lamb he is. Now,
let's see what Ratty has to say!"

"Dear Pam," de Rattrec Gilbert Yeoland Maxse had
say, on the thick grey paper of his regiment, "I think y
are really rather a rotter never to write to me. I think y
must be pretty ashamed of the way you live, or you wou
let me know where you are! So do be sensible and write
me. I can tell you, my good girl, it isn't every fellow in
position who would bother about a girl in yours, and y
ought to be grateful to me, instead of ignoring my l
ters, and forbidding that old ass Cazalet to tell me yo
address.

"I was down at the old place last week for a week, a
Julia Yeoland told me that she had heard you were on
Variety-stage, but that isn't true, or I'd have seen you.
write now to wish you many happy returns. (Do you reme
ber the birthday when I chased you up the old tower in
ruin, and the awful row we had?) You always were
little wild-cat. And do write and let a fellow know h
you are. You needn't be afraid of my wanting to ma
you any more, that was only calf-love, as they say. I h
been in love no end of times since, but I want to know h

you are. Evey says you looked pretty shabby the last time she saw you, and the Duchess is furious with you for your behaviour to her. So buck up and send a line to

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"DE R. G. Y. MAXSE."

"Almost every sentence begins with 'I'," commented Pam aloud to herself; "poor old Ratty, what an idiot he is!"

The next letter was a bill from a French charcutier in Holborn, and the last one, had Mildred, whose broad thumb had made a big smudge on it, but known, was from the Duchess of Wight!

"DEAR PAM:—

"Fred Yeoland tells me that old Cazalet is the one member of the clan with whom you deign to remain in communication, so as I very much want news of you, I am sending this down to him to be forwarded. My dear child, *where* and *how* are you?

"It is over two years since I met you that day outside Hatchard's, and until last Monday I have not had a glimpse of you. And on Monday, as you were on a 'bus, hobnobbing shamelessly with the driver, and I in my lowly victoria trying to cross Piccadilly at Sackville Street, the view was not very satisfying!

"Why did you not answer my letter? And where are you, and is poor Jane Pilgrim, excellent woman, still alive? Please write and tell me these things, for although you have behaved so abominably to one of your grandfather's oldest

friends, and though it is high time that you gave up your ridiculous, runaway tricks, I still love you, though if I had any pride I should have forgotten you ages ago!

"And another thing. Julia Yeoland tells everyone that you have gone under,—of course to justify herself for never having done anything for you. Your grandfather, dear man, would turn in his coffin if he knew that she says that you are dancing in short skirts in East End 'Halls', etc. She is a hateful woman, and I am so glad the King can't bear her.

"Now, do send me a line, my dear, and say that you will come to see me. I will promise not to tell anyone where you are living, if you insist, though useless mystery is a waste of good material!

"To-morrow is your birthday, as it was my poor boy's. My love to you, and best wishes. And do come to see me, for your grandfather's sake.

"Yours affectionately,

"ELIZA WIGHT.

"P. S.—Henny was asking about you only the other day. Poor Henny, you would hardly know her, she has gone off so. Their boy is very delicate and she is always worried about him. He is a darling little fellow, though, and a great comfort to her."

Pam locked this letter away in a tin despatch-box, the key of which hung on her watch-chain, and after sitting for a moment in troubled thought, went into the next room.

CHAPTER II

BREAKFAST stood on a table by the fire, and in a much worn chintz-covered arm-chair near it an old woman sat knitting; a hard-featured old woman, whose small button of nearly white hair barefacedly gave the lie to the mahogany-coloured front that sat so oddly over her shaggy grey eyebrows.

Pam, slim and tall in her dark-brown frock, bent and kissed the wooden cheek held up to her, and sat down to her breakfast.

"Good gracious, Pilly," she began, beheading her egg and peering at it with the close attention never bestowed upon eggs in higher spheres, "what's the matter? You look as cross as seven sticks! Have you forgotten that this is a joyful occasion? That your beloved nursling is twenty-seven years old to-day?"

"I wish you many 'appy returns, I'm sure, Miss Pam," answered the old woman, lugubriously; "and I'm glad that you can take things so easy."

Pam laid down her spoon, and leaning her elbows on the table, clasped her hands under her chin and gazed steadily at the old woman.

"Now, Pilgrim," she said, severely, "you are not going to spoil my birthday with one of your grouches. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to be so discontented. You were so ill, and now you are better, you hated No. 27, and now

we are in this *much* nicer house, and you like Mrs. Kingdom, and you have the comfortable mantle, with beads on it, that you wanted. So please buck up and be your own dear, pleasant self, for my birthday."

Pilgrim's eyes filled with the scarce, painful tears of old age. "As if it was that," she protested, with a sniff. "As if it was about *me!* And as if I could help it! I'm just a cross-grained old woman, a cucumberer of the earth, and an expense to you. And to see you looking so ill, Miss Pam, and the silk on your cuffs all wore out, and you a-living in this 'ere way—it's that that comes over me sometimes till I can't stand it!"

"Nonsense! Perfect rubbish! If I don't mind my shabby clothes (and I don't), surely you ought to be able to bear them. And as to my looking ill, you know perfectly well that I'm *never* ill. Who has had three bad illnesses in the last nine years? You or me?"

"You get thinner every day," retorted Pilgrim, now sobbing outright; "and if your poor grandfather could see you *now, wouldn't* 'e say you look like a monkey!"

The girl raised her eyes and inspected herself in the glass opposite. In the strong light she looked older than her twenty-seven years, for there were delicate lines about her eyes and mouth, and her smooth cheeks were slightly hollow. She was thin, too, far too thin; her waist was almost ludicrously slight under the brown leather belt, and the cheap stuff of her clumsily made frock betrayed unmercifully the angles of her elbows and shoulders. She was a healthy creature enough, but she had lived in poverty for years,

and her body had, as bodies will, adapted itself to its circumstances.

After a moment the old servant, encouraged by her mistress's silence, blew her nose and wiped her eyes. "You've been writing again, Miss Pam," she said, with a last sniff, "you've been a-working at one of them stories, and you hadn't ought. You'll lose all your looks if you go on like that."

Pam burst out laughing, her teeth flashing white. "And what a boundless misfortune that would be, oh, Pilly! Immortal beauty like mine lost to the world."

"Well,—whatever it was, it's *going*," answered Pilgrim, crossly. "I'm very glad Mr. and Mrs. Sacheverel and 'is Lordship can't see you now."

"So am I. Poor darling old G.F., how he'd hate—this," glancing about the room. "Funny how one can get used to things! I say, Pilly," she continued, picking a substantial bit of coal from her toast, and looking at it with the resignation of one accustomed to such culinary phenomena, "guess whom I had a letter from this morning?"

"Mr. Cazalet, and Mr. Ratty, and a bill, and—another letter. That girl brought 'em in 'ere when she made the fire. A pretty state they must 'ave been in, too, by the time you got 'em!"

"Well,—the letter was from the Duchess. It appears that the ducal eye fell on me the other day on the top of a 'bus, and so she wrote to me care of Cazzy, and he forwarded it."

Jane Pilgrim, formerly a bit of drift-wood on Life's high

seas, now shut in a London backwater, dropped her knitting and clasped her hands in her excitement.

"'Er Grace! Oh, Miss Pam——"

The girl's dark eyes softened to a look of great tenderness as they rested on the flushed face opposite her. As a child and very young girl she had owned a monkey, to which little beast's eyes she had often been told her own bore a startling resemblance, and now as she watched Pilgrim's pathetic joy over the Duchess's letter, there certainly was in the gaze something of the misty wistfulness of the simian's.

"Such a nice letter, Pilly, dear,—and her love to you,—and she wants to see me."

Pilgrim's lips shook, and for a moment she could not speak, and then, when Pam had hastened to add, "and I am going," the old woman returned, acidly, "I'm glad you 'ave *that* much sense!" Pam, with wisdom born of long experience, continued her breakfast in silence.

The sitting-room was, in spite of its shabbiness, less appallingly ugly than the bedroom, for there were some books in a cheap painted bookcase and on the table, some growing plants and a canary in the windows, and clean, or comparatively clean, chintz covers to the chairs and the sofa. On the table stood a big double picture-frame of crimson imitation-leather, containing a photograph of a handsome middle-aged man in a velvet coat, and a wonderfully beautiful woman in evening dress. On the wall over the sofa hung a large picture, also a photograph, of an old country-house surrounded by fine trees, and flanked on the right by an ancient ruin. Under this a fourth photograph showed a pleasant-faced, worldly-

looking man, dressed in the height of the fashion of 1870. This was the late Lord Yeoland, of Monks' Yeoland, the house hanging above him, father of the beautiful woman in the crimson frame, and, through her, Pam's grandfather.

Beyond these few things there were no efforts at beautifying in the room, and the depressing brown wallpaper was further enlivened only by a chromo of Sunrise on Mont Blanc, an engraving of Queen Victoria holding the present King as a young infant in her arms, and one representing an Evangelical missionary extending his hands to the enthusiastic kisses of scantily-attired heathen on some palm-covered Eastern isle.

Pam crunched her toast and gazed indulgently at her surroundings. "The time," she remarked, presently, "appears to have arrived for me to mend that rug. You are lugubrious, my ancient retaineress, as melancholy as that unknown beast, a Gib Cat, but I should hate to lose you, and you stumble every time you cross the room, and every time you stumble, moreover, you stretch the hole!"

"To think——" began the old woman, but Pam interrupted her ruthlessly. "I also have a letter from the gentle Ratty! Did I tell you? Sweet youth, he wrote under pressure from his strong family feeling."

"Mr. Ratty is a very pleasant young gentleman——"

"'Pilly, you vampire, you lie!'"

Pilgrim rose. "Well, really, Miss Pam! You never before said anything *that* bad to me, and I must say——"

"It wasn't me—*I*—that said it! It's a great big sledge-hammer of a man who writes delicate, rapier-like plays—

it's a paraphrase, Pilly,—it's a—joke! I only meant to make you laugh. And you *know* Ratty isn't a very pleasant young —anything. He's a great big, lumpish, hulking, pestiferous goose of a youth. And you *know* you used to loathe him, 'befo' de wah'! Do you remember the time he put a toad in your bed? And how he used to pounce on you in the passages? I know what you want, you old fraud. You want me to marry him! Years ago you would have stabbed me at the very altar if I had accepted him, but now, in the decline of my powers, in the wreck of my beauty, in the autumn of my youth, you think him good enough for me! Oh, shame on you!" the girl went on, looking, in her amusement, much younger than she had when serious; "out upon you, you scheming old jade! Besides, though I'd do anything to oblige you, Miss Pilgrim, he tells me in this letter that he no longer wants to marry me, so your plotting is in vain, and you must resign yourself to my fading unplucked on the parent bush."

Pilgrim did not answer. Adversity had soured and embittered her, but her heart was faithful to its last drop of blood, and the cruellest pang that heart had to bear was the one caused by what she considered the failure in life of her beloved child. To her, as to most people of her class, a husbandless woman was indeed a failure to be sneered at by all proud possessors of legitimate tyrants,—idlers, drunkards, maltreaters, though they might be,—and the thought that her idolised (though much tormented) Pam would soon have passed her youth without being sought in marriage by any but the objectionable Ratty Maxse and one other hurt

the old woman in a way the girl was far from realising. So in silence Pam finished her breakfast, set the tray on the floor outside the door, and then taking a big needle and stout thread sat down by the fire and, dragging the rug over her knees, began to mend the hole in a rather boggling but efficient enough fashion.

"How did you sleep, Pilly?" she asked, presently drawing the thread through the heavy carpet with a grating noise.

"Bad, Miss Pam, thank you; them pains gets worse and worse."

"Oh, no, they don't. If they had got worse you'd have been dead long ago. They are getting better and better, as the doctor will convince you when he comes. Poor, young man, he seems to come oftener than he need," she continued, with a sly face; "it is very evil of you to lead him on in this way! But I'm going to pay him to-day, for you really don't need him any longer. You are going out for a walk to-morrow, too."

Pilgrim sniffed. She had enjoyed the excitement of her recent illness, and Pam's concentrated attention had delighted and flattered her vanity. And now she resented the cutting short of her convalescence. "I'm quite sure I shan't be able to walk for another week. My knees are that weak,—what if I fainted in the street?"

Pam cut her thread and eyed her darn critically. "We ought to have a garden-roller to flatten down that bump," she observed; "you used to fall into the hole, now you'll stumble against the hummock. However—" she went on, rising and putting away her thimble and needle, "you won't

faint, and if you did, Mildred could carry you upstairs quite easily."

Pilgrim shuddered fastidiously, and before she could answer, the doctor came in.

This gentleman was a curly-haired youth, with a round face sprinkled with a richness of rural-looking freckles. He had a reddish moustache, small milky teeth and an innocent and boyish smile.

He had left the sheltering wing of Bart's only a few months before, and was leading a jocund life with other medical youths and terpsichorean fays from eight at night until three in the morning, and then, after four hours' dreamless slumber, arose and pursued, as he put it, the profitable patient until the hour of release again sounded. On the whole an honest, kindly, conscientious young medico, with, under a stratum of enthusiastic frivolity, the budding germ of devotion to his profession and pity for suffering humanity.

Pam liked Dr. Anglin, who was a year younger than herself, and as he was a gentleman, and because no other gentleman had come her way for years, had enjoyed her frequent talks with him during Pilgrim's illness.

And she was sorry, now, to have to ask him not to come again. When he had, a curious, shadow-like gravity settling down on his young face while he did so, examined his patient, and pronounced her to be progressing to his entire satisfaction, Pam sent Pilgrim out of the room.

"I must thank you for being so kind to my poor old nurse," she said, "and will you please send me your bill? I think there is no longer any necessity for your coming,—

don't you? If she should have a relapse, I could always send for you,——"

He nodded, his blue eyes solemn. "Yes. I—I hope you don't think I have come too often, Miss Yeoland?"

She hastened to convince him that she did not think this, and then shook hands with him.

"You—you aren't looking up to much yourself," he commented, ingenuously. "I'm not trying to drum up another patient, you know, but you are very pale."

She laughed, and liked him so much that she would have enjoyed stroking his unmanageable, ruddy curls.

"I have been in the house too much, of late, that's all; I have never been ill in my life."

He went away, thinking with delight of the money she was to send him, and of a supper to which he was going that night, and of a certain votary of Terpsichore. Pam had grown really fond of the friendly boy with his little affectations of wisdom—and his conscientious care for the invalid, but he had not given her a thought, because he had considered her plain and passé, and rather like his eldest sister.

When he had gone, Pam went and told Pilgrim, whom she found inspecting the grey-looking linen just brought from the wash, that she was going out.

"I'm going to see the Duchess, Pilly. She is so very kind, and she was a very old friend of my grandfather's. You are glad, aren't you? I suppose I'd better put on my new hat and dazzle her?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Pam. You owe respect and—obedience

to 'er Grace. I'm sure 'is Lordship would have wanted you to do whatever she says."

"Not he," laughed Pam, pinning on the new hat, an eight-and-sixpenny confection from the Tottenham Court Road; "they used to fight like anything. Do I look nice, Pilly?"

Pilly surveyed her critically. "Yes, Miss Pam, very nice. And if you keep your arm down she'll never see the patch." Kissing her good-bye, Pam left the room, and feeling her way to the stair-head, plunged into the narrow abyss with the recklessness born of long habit.

The sun was trying to come out, and the thick yellow fog which had long since disappeared from the upper windows of the houses in Huntley Street was now clearing reluctantly from the street itself, whirling in big curves back from the slippery and gleaming pavement against the dingy houses, whence it slowly ebbed away into nothingness. Turning into Guilford Street, Pam made her way to Russell Square, whence, striking off to her left, she passed along Montague Place, past the back of the Museum, up Great Russell Street, Charing Cross Road, and Shaftesbury Avenue, to Piccadilly.

CHAPTER III

PAM was a human greyhound, if she was a dog at all, and surely all of us have doggish affinities. She loved walking, and her years of poverty had taught her how to walk.

Her short skirts safe from the mud, her small feet in stout shoes, the very hat on her head, were all adapted to pedestrianism and helped to make her advance along the crowded ways the easy progress it was. Slim, alert, graceful and gracious she sped westward, jostling no one, accepting the jostlings of others with good humour, avoiding with skill the small accidents that beset less knowing wayfarers, crossing crowded streets fearlessly and with daring good judgment.

She was happy that morning; Pilgrim was pronounced to be, humanly speaking, out of danger; when she went home her room would be sweet with the scent of Monks' Yeoland flowers, her new story was progressing and she was to have ten pounds for it, she would, now that Pilgrim no longer needed her, have time again for long walks, the sun had actually come out and the sky was blue, and she was going to see the Duchess. At last she reached Berkeley Square and stood looking up at the lace-hung windows that brought out in such startling relief the blackness of the walls.

"Every bit as dingy as *my* palazzo," she told herself, as she rang.

But if the outside of the house was shabby, inside everything was deeply, softly luxurious, from the mossy carpets,

such as the girl had not set foot to for years, to the mellow glow of the electric lights.

Yes, Her Grace was at home, and after a short wait in a small room filled with beautiful things, chiefly, it seemed to the girl's unaccustomed eyes, of silver and crystal and growing plants, she was ushered up the wide stairs past a huge clock that chimed at her as she passed it, into Her Grace's morning-room.

When, a few minutes later, the Duchess came in, she found her visitor standing in a well-remembered attitude before a life-sized portrait of a pleasantly cynical-looking old gentleman, who smiled down at her with the slightly hunched shoulders and the hands clasped behind his back that, reproduced in the girl looking back at him, was so characteristic of them both.

"Pam!"

Pam wheeled round with wet eyes, and the Duchess rushed at her and embraced her. "Oh, my dear child, to see you standing there by him,—so absurdly like him, though he was so fair, and you are so dark! I wonder that you dare to face him, after the way you have behaved since he—went!"

Pam wiped her eyes with the tip of a gloved finger and then felt for her handkerchief. "I know he wouldn't have bullied me," she returned, bursting into a smile, "and I *am* so glad to see you." And they sat down on a perilously fragile-looking sofa that bore the old lady's weight with surprising fortitude.

"But tell me,—where are you living?"

"In a cave I dug under the Mansion House. We live on nuts and bananas thrown to us by benevolent Italians—No, really, you needn't worry! We live in highly respectable lodgings, and I am an admirable chaperon for Pilgrim. And we lead the most virtuous and harmless of lives, and have marmalade for breakfast on Sundays——"

"But where is it? Now that I've got you, I'm not going to lose you," persisted the Duchess.

Pam kissed her. "Please don't tease me! If you do, I'll be sorry I came, and it is such a nice birthday-party to see you. And I *do* so like this colour for your hair."

"Do you, you villain! Good heavens, Pam, you said that so like Oswald! Well, yes, it's a nice, quiet colour, isn't it? A man in Wigmore Street does it,—such a beautiful street for a modern hair-dresser to live in, I always think. Well,—have you really enough money to live comfortably?"

"Plenty. And you know I had some jewels, too. I have sold two rings, and have one left."

"Rings? Not from your grandfather, were they?"

"No. They were left me by Madame Ravoglio."

"The actress? Dear me, I saw her twice. Yes, I remember Oswald's telling me that you had known her when you were—with your father and mother. I am glad to know you had the rings. Oh, you little brute," continued the old lady, patting Pam's hands with her cushiony one, "you might have told me long ago. I owe many a sleepless night to your obstinacy about that little sum of money I wanted to give you."

"Dear Duchess, I couldn't! I really couldn't."

"And your grandfather and I were punished with the same birch when we were children and would probably have married when I was eighteen and he twenty, if I had not been so poor. Though, to be sure," she added, with the quaint frankness of which the incidents of a long and varied life had never robbed her, "I don't think he ever was a bit in love with me. He just thought he was, you know, as boys so often do. You ought to have had the generosity to have let me know where you were, at least, even if you wouldn't let me help you. However,—it was perfectly in character, your disappearing like that. How's Caliban?"

"Dead. He only lived a year after we came to London, poor Cally!"

"And—what do you do? Do you slum?"

Pam laughed. "Oh, dear, no. I just live along from day to day. Oh,—if you will swear not to tell I'll tell you a secret."

"I swear!"

"Well,—I write. I have written twenty-two novels in the last six years!"

"Twenty-two——"

"Novels. Yes."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me some money? My luck at Bridge is infamous. But seriously, child, what do you mean?"

Pam laughed. "I mean just that. I really *have* written twenty-two novels, and they come out in a sky-blue periodical called—but that I shan't tell. And they are eagerly read by a large circle of admirers! I get letters about them.

And now," she continued, peremptorily, "tell me about yourself."

"Oh, there's little to tell about me. I am very well,—all but my eyes, which trouble me a good deal. I am growing old, my dear."

"And—Lady Henrietta," Pam went on, with an effort, "and—Mr. Peele?"

The old lady sighed. "Poor Henny, she has lost her looks. I always told her she would,—it was chiefly colour, you know. And Marmy, her boy, is very delicate,—a wee weak thing. She is in a constant state of anxiety about him. As to James,—oh, well, James is James, and no more need be said; you know what *that* means. I never wanted her to marry him, you may remember, and I never thought that he really cared for her, but she would have him, and I must say she never complains."

"But,—surely he is not bad to her?"

The Duchess laughed. "Oh, dear, no! He is on the contrary much blander and easier to get on with than he used to be. He is most agreeable, even. Only,—well, you know Henny comes of a race of political fighters, and she was more disappointed than anyone but me even suspected when he gave up all his ambitions and settled comfortably down as a rich woman's husband."

Pam flushed, a little angrily. "He never would have done that if his health had not given way," she protested. "I read about it in the papers at the time, and I was dreadfully sorry for him. It—must have nearly killed him! He was the most ambitious man I ever knew, and I am sure——"

"My dear child, this is a new rôle for you! You never liked him, as I perfectly well remember."

"That needn't prevent my trying to be just, need it? You see, I knew him that time in—Derbyshire, when he was ill the first time, and—he used nearly to despair——"

The old lady nodded.

"Well, well, of course you are right, and it was hard on him, but—his health has been quite excellent for the past five years, but he has made no effort to make up for lost time."

"I am sorry," murmured Pam, absently, "a lost ambition seems a pitiful kind of thing,—he should have been fighting,"—she half closed her eyes and seemed to be mentally watching the foregone battles in question, her face intent and eager. "However,—a weak heart is a terrible handicap. Now tell me about Lady Yeoland. Why is she lying about me?"

The Duchess laughed. "Because she's ashamed of having treated you as she did."

"Well, but that was nine years ago!"

"I know. It was at Evelyn Chesney's,—I dined there the other night, and the Pocklingtons were there. We were talking about old times, and he suddenly asked, quite audibly, what had become of you. I didn't answer, just to have the pleasure of seeing Julia wriggle, and—she wriggled."

"I saw Evelyn about a year ago, and I have always sent her a Christmas card, to say that all was well with me,——"

"Evelyn was talking to her latest admirer and didn't

hear, and then Sir Henry turned to Julia and asked her outright where you were."

"Poor Julia!"

"Yes. She didn't exactly cover herself with glory, I must say. She stammered out that she really knew nothing about you, that you had behaved very queerly at the time of Oswald's death, etc. Then he said he had been so fond of you, and that as Oswald had loved you more than anyone and had fully intended making some provision for you, of course Fred Yeoland had done so. At that I explained with a sweet smile that nothing had been done for you, and that you had refused to let even me help you."

"Oh, you dear," murmured the girl.

"And at that the creature lost her head and came out with the stupid lie that she could not look you up as she would have wished to, because she had heard that you were singing or dancing at the Halls! The Fat Boy, who was there, denied this loudly, and of course I did too, but having hatched her story she'll take good care to keep it going, you may be sure."

"She always was a cat; not that I knew her, but my G.F. never could bear her. She refused to know me, you know,—but didn't Evelyn speak up?"

The Duchess hesitated.

"Yes,—but not forcefully. She didn't say that she had heard from you."

"Then she lied just as much as Lady Yeoland. And I must say I prefer a nice courageous, outspoken lie to an unsaid one. However, Evelyn of course likes being on

good terms with the Yeolands, and she always was a coward. Ratty was always odious, but he had more pluck than she."

As she finished speaking the clock on the stairs chimed the hour. It was one o'clock. Pam started up. "Oh, I had no idea it was so late. I must be off, or Pilgrim will be frightened."

"But you will stay to lunch, surely! I have two such nice people coming,—Marietta Wynn, the one who whistles so beautifully, and Evelyn's admirer, one of the Russian secretaries, quite the most delightful man in town."

"I can't stay, dear Duchess."

"But you are not going to disappear again? Pam,—I am old, and lonely, and I always loved you."

There was regret, and something like pity in the girl's face as she bent and kissed the youthfully blooming, delicately scented cheek of the old woman, but there was no hesitation.

"I must disappear," she said, "I must go back to my cave. You see cave-dwellers can't stand the broad light of the surface-world. It dazzles their eyes and shows the patches on their clothes."

"Pam!"

"Yes. And I am poor, you know, quite ridiculously poor, and I can't live with rich people. You must let me go."

"But,—will you come to me for a visit, then,—say only for a week? Then I'll *promise* to let you go,—I will put up Pilly, and you can do just as you like,——"

The too-red lips of the kind old woman were trembling, and Pam took her hands gently in her own.

"Dear Duchess, listen what R.K. says:—

"'GOOD-BYE, G. F.'"

"Cave-Right is the right of the father,
—to hunt by himself for his own:
He is free of all calls to the pack,
He is judged by the Council alone."

"But you are not a father!"

"Yes, I am; I am the father of my own independent thoughts, and of my own independent life. I am poor, and shabby, and of no account, but—I am freed by circumstances, freed of all calls to the pack,—don't you see? So you must let me go. It isn't that I don't love you dearly for wanting me, or that I don't love to be with you,—only —I must go back to my cave in the jungle." The Duchess understood.

"Very well, my dear. As you like. But come to see me sometimes for *his* sake, and I will not torment you to stay. I never understood why you deserted us all, but I suppose you had reasons, and I see what you mean about your cave-right."

Pam kissed her affectionately. "Thank you. Good-bye." Then she turned and looking at the portrait, added gravely, "Good-bye, G.F."

And the Duchess, studying the living face and the pictured one, marvelled again at the likeness between them; the whimsical set to the corners of the mouths, and the contrasting, but by no means contradictory, almost tragic expression in the deep-set eyes, the one pair so blue, the other so dark.

"How like him you are," she commented, thoughtfully, "and yet he was a much gayer nature than you."

"Yes, he was gay, but I too am gay—in the jungle. Your civilised magnificence oppresses my savage spirit,—well, good-bye again. And I promise that if ever I need help of any kind I will come to you, and—I will come again some day."

A moment later she left the house and came out into a thick fog that had crept unseen by her over its patient victim, the city.

As she started across the square a caprice of the aerial monster brought her suddenly face to face with a man who apparently had sprung at her out of the earth. They both laughed, and then he raised his hat, showing her beautifully smooth yellow hair, and said with a curious distinctness of enunciation, "I beg your pardon." Then the fog closed down again, and she was alone, the picture of his face remaining with her as clear and distinct as his own utterance.

He looked, with his delicate features, beautiful, firm-cut mouth and prominent chin, like someone, or some picture she had recently seen. Who, or whose picture was it?

Then, as she climbed to the top of her 'bus, she remembered. Lamartine. Lamartine with a glass in his eye, a most beautiful and glossy hat, a baroque pearl in his black satin tie.

CHAPTER IV

ONE day, some four weeks after her visit to the Duchess, Pam walked along a broad street near Buckingham Palace, and pausing at the windows of an attractive-looking shop, stood studying the multifarious and strikingly heterogeneous array of articles spread before her on the velvet-carpeted inclined plane behind the beautifully clean plate-glass.

There were bits of old silver, delightful shagreen boxes, several pairs of diamond earrings, an inlaid ebony and ivory chest with silver handles, a pair of field-glasses, a miniature of Lady Hamilton, poor woman, bequeathed by her and its hero to the nation, only to die in a foreign garret, —a magnificent gold-embroidered chasuble, a gold-mounted dressing-bag, a French doll attired with doubtful taste in pink silk and yellow lace, and a pair of old paste shoebuckles.

A very wonderful shop-window, and a very wonderful shop. After a leisurely survey of the treasures in the window, Pam went in and stood looking round her with the air of one perfectly at home in a familiar though queer place, until one of the two men behind the crowded counters should be free to wait upon her.

A smartly dressed woman with a dotted veil drawn taut over her vivid complexion had taken from a travelling-bag some silver salt-cellars and a big candelabra of the same metal.

"What will you give me for these?" she was saying,

with an airy grace evidently aimed at the presumably susceptible heart of the youth who was waiting on her. "All family things,—my husband's family,—and I shouldn't think of giving them up, only my flat is so small that every inch of room is precious." Catching sight of Pam she repeated more loudly, "Y—yaus,—my flat is so absurdly small, and we are going to the Riviera for the winter, this weather is so abominable!"

The fashionably dressed young man listened unmoved. Little he recked whether the flat was large or small, or simply, as he strongly suspected, non-existent. Impassive as the little Indian idol at his elbow, he made his tests, weighed the silver, made certain entries in a certain large book, and paid a certain sum to the Riviera-bound lady, who cast it carelessly into her purple velvet châtelaine-bag and sauntered absent-mindedly out into the crisp December afternoon.

Then the youth, whose superior was still busy displaying a set of ivory chessmen to an old man who himself looked, Pam thought, strikingly like one of the yellow-visaged kings, turned to the girl.

"Good-morning, Miss."

Pam nodded amiably. "Good-morning. Is Mr. Cornwall in? I want to pawn a ring."

Mr. Cornwall, when dragged from his lair behind the shop, proved to be an elegantly-attired, middle-aged man whose hair was sweet and glossy with precious ointments, and whose nails though not quite clean, showed unmistakeable signs of having been submitted no later than yesterday to the manicure's gentle arts. And his nose turned up as

if declaring almost blatantly the Christianity of his origin. Pam had known this gentleman for several years, and from the first moment of their acquaintance had been deeply sure that not for the most beautifully Greek feature in the world would he have exchanged his so obviously unhebraic nose.

"Good-morning,—ah, Miss Yeoland! I—I was sorry you could not redeem the emerald," he began, as he recognised her, "an American lady bought it; it was a pity."

"Yes, I was sorry,—but I could not help it. I have a ruby for you this morning, Mr. Cornwall."

Stripping off her glove she gave him the ring. Then she listened, as did the two now unoccupied young men, for the sound of approval.

It came, this sound of approval, but not from Mr. Cornwall's mouth, as might have been expected by any uninitiated onlooker. It came from his nose, for when this Christian was pleased with an object, he snored at it.

And now Mr. Cornwall snored loudly at the ring once given to a great actress by a man who loved her, and the snore was the nearest approach to a purr that Pam had ever heard from a human being.

"This is a very fine ruby," began the Christian Grimalkin with a certain air of discriminating benevolence peculiar to him, "a very fine ruby, indeed."

"Yes," returned Pam, "I want sixty pounds on it." If it had been her first visit to the place, she would have said "for it."

Grimalkin purred again. Then he mewed out that sixty pounds was a very large, a very large sum of money.

"And I want large sums," returned the girl, coolly. As she spoke the door opened, and someone came in, but she went on without looking round, "Come, Mr. Cornwall, you know it's worth the money. At fifteen per cent. for two years. I—I shall try very hard to redeem this one, but if I am not able to——" She shrugged her thin shoulders with the inborn philosophy that had stood her so often in such good stead.

Then while Cornwall, snoring and mewing alternately, as the beauty of the ruby or the enormous value of the £60 dominated his mind by turn, produced his large book and filled in the certificate, Pam studied the countless little knickknacks in the glass case before her.

Times had been very hard of late, for the doctor's bill had had to be paid, and the chemist's, and shoes and a dress for Pilgrim, as well as odds and ends of tempting food to help on the poor woman's delicate appetite. Christmas usually brought a cheque from Japan, but this year Sacheverel had sent his dear daughter, instead, a beautiful pale-blue kimono embroidered all over with redlegged storks and lotus-flowers. Over this magnificent but bitterly disappointing gift the girl had all but wept, and to rectify matters had been forced to part with the one ring she had hoped always to keep.

At length Grimalkin opened a drawer and counted out sixty beautiful golden sovereigns, and Pam dropped the warm money into her cold and hungry little purse. "Now will you just sign here?——" While the girl filled out the blank she listened while the newcomer to the shop talked

to one of the shopmen about a shagreen case he was examining.

"Thirty-five shillings? It is a most excellent box, but—very small."

"It's a real antique," responded the youth, and the would-be buyer laughed,—a quiet, well-bred, amused laugh.

"I know that quite well," he answered.

Then, as Cornwall tore from the book and gave to Pam her half of their contract, the girl turned to look at the man whose voice was so pleasant. It was Lamartine! The man she had met in the fog on leaving the Duchess's that day.

Lamartine splendid in clothes straight from Savile Row, the most beautiful of top hats, the slimmest and glossiest of boots, the newest and most exquisitely cut of gloves.

His faintly-marked eyebrow pounced down on his glass as he recognised her, and he stared hard, but quite inoffensively as he made way for her to pass, and held the door open until she had disappeared round the corner, wondering how it was that such flagrant dandyism was not disagreeable; how it was that his small, delicate face so utterly dominated the rest of him that even now, with the impression of his perfection of attire so fresh in her mind, she could not remember the colour of his trousers or the kind of flower he wore in his coat.

It was his face that she remembered; the large, light-green eyes, so beautifully cut, so luminous, so almost browless and lashless; the serenity of his broad brow, the bland beauty of his beardless mouth.

It was a face to be remembered, and she remembered it

with the most amazing distinctness, but in the meantime £60 sang in her pocket; sang of new stays for Pilly; of a dozen oranges for the same dear person; of new gloves and new stockings for herself; of a hat with a feather for Mildred the slavey; besides the deep-noted hymn-of-thanksgiving for solid pounds in Pilly's double-locked keeping.

So Lamartine faded away into that limbo of memory where haphazard impressions store themselves until they are wanted in the foreground.

When she reached home she found a letter from Japan, and sitting by the fire, after the transfer of fifty of the sixty pounds to the old woman, she opened it.

"My dear Pam," she read, in the neat, artistic hand she had as a child tried, and for inner reasons, failed, in trying to copy, "I hope the kimono reached you all right? I thought it would please you instead of the eternal ten pounds, and as I chose it myself, I hope it suits you? I was sorry to hear that you still persist in living apart from all your old friends, but of course you know best, and of course, comparatively poor as you are, it would be hard for you to live with rich people.

"Your grandfather, when he wrote your mother of his intention to provide for you, mentioned the above reason as his for putting you down in his will. I have always thought the sum must have been an unnecessarily small one, as you have never mentioned it in your letters, but I am grateful to him for leaving you anything, for more than one reason, for it would, as you know, have come hard on

me to have to give you an allowance, after my incredibly asinine performances that autumn on the Bourse, just before we sailed.

"So let us be thankful, *cara figliuola mia,* that you have enough to live comfortably, and no doubt you enjoy life quite as much, and have made quite as pleasant friends as if you had clung to the Duchess and the Fred Yeolands.

"News I have none. Your mother is amazing. When I look at her I cannot believe my own absolute knowledge that she is nearly fifty years old. I am having her portrait done by a little Italian out here for his health, and it will not surprise you to hear that he has fallen madly in love with her. It amuses us both, but she is so exquisite that I quite understand and pity the poor wretch.

"By the way, Burke has been with us! Poor old chap, I pitied him, too,—he is lonely and half-ill, and bored by everything. He was here a month, and I was very glad to see him again. He told us about his first meeting with you, at Aix. What an imp you were, little daughter!

"He enquired about you, of course, but he did not ask for your address, though he was going to London, via New York, on business. He told me of his promise not to 'bother' you. Sometimes I wish you had married him, Pam. In spite of what you say, I fear you must often be lonely, and he would have been very good to you. However, no doubt you know best, as I always gave you credit for doing.

"And here you are twenty-eight years old and still unmarried! I should have thought my daughter and hers

would have had humanity enough to love some man by this time. Have you not? Perhaps you used to be a deer, ages ago, and once Diana chased and caught you, and then with a long look into your big eyes set you free but kept your spirit captive forever?

"It is late at night, my dear, so forgive your old father his little rhapsody. Your mother sends you her fondest love, and so do I. Some day you must come out and visit us. Japan is the only country left to the lover of the beautiful. I hope poor old Pilly is quite well? Many kind messages from us both, and to you my love.

"Your affectionate father,

"GUY SACHEVEREL."

For a long time the girl sat musing over this extremely characteristic communication. Its key-note "you know best" had always been that of her father's attitude towards her. At ten years old he had assumed that she knew best, and had allowed her to go her own way. And in his turn, he and her beautiful mother had gone their way under their perennial honeymoon so entranced by its golden light that they almost forgot the child in the shadow.

And the child had grown to girlhood and to womanhood, always "knowing best," making up her innocent mind on all sorts of less innocent matters, following her instinct, drawing on her small stock of experience for guidance, running into horrible danger, suffering, blundering, and then escaping the danger at the cost of infinite disillusionment and pain, only by reason of a certain purity of heart that

by some merciful dispensation had survived the appalling perils it had run.

And at this crucial time the Honey-mooners had lightly sailed away in a friend's yacht to see Japan, and when old Lord Yeoland was found to have neglected adding to his will the codicil that would have provided for Pam, the girl had never told her parents, and liking Japan they had stayed on in that delectable country, their harmony undisturbed by one conscience-prick about the girl who knew best.

And being now much older, in ways that count, than her light-hearted children of parents, the girl sat by the fire and smiled a tenderly indulgent little smile over her father's letter.

For she was of strong fibre, and it had resisted the tests to which it had been put, and they had not hurt her. And when, after her hour of disaster, her world had stopped whirling over abysmal horrors, a gift given to her at her birth by a benevolent old fairy with a crooked smile, had again resumed its temporarily deadened powers, and gone on developing until she was, so to say, doubly armed.

For a sense of humour is to a lonely citizen of the world what is to a shipwrecked sailor on a desert island the knife with which he hews the logs to make his hut, and cuts the fruit by which he lives. And, therefore, Pam sat that afternoon smiling over the affectionate selfishness of her father's letter.

And her thin face was very pleasant when she smiled the smile of the girl who knew best.

CHAPTER V

DECEMBER wore away; a mild saffron month moist with thick misty rain and thin-coated, slippery mud.

As it advanced and Christmas crowds thronged the streets, it was marked by increased difficulties in getting both in and out of the bun-and-milk establishments, greater danger in crossing the streets, and augmented peril of death by crushing, in the crowded but genial 'bus.

Pam went to a play or two, sitting contentedly in the second gallery and chatting as a friendly matter of course with her neighbours,—to the frosty indignation of Pilgrim whose cup nearly overflowed when on one of these occasions of mirth and jollity Pam was offered, and accepted, a pink peppermint lozenge by a young man in checked clothes and a beautifully oiled fringe.

Pam and Pilgrim ate their Christmas dinner, as they had eaten so many, quite alone, and the pudding weighed several pounds and gave the old woman a violent indigestion which necessitated a sporadic outbreak of visits from Dr. Anglin, and added to the excitement if not to the comfort of the holiday atmosphere.

January came in colder than December, but speedily weakened into a muggy imitation of its predecessor, and while people who are always warm grumbled over the unseasonable mildness of the new month, Pam, if always fairly warm herself, lived too near to those who can be

so only when the air warms them, was glad of the mildness and watched the thermometer anxiously, fearing the delicious invigorating cold that she loved.

One morning when there was for a wonder no rain, and a certain luminousness in the yellow air offered a faint hope of sunshine, the girl decided to go to the National Gallery and spend an hour among Turner's water-colours.

It is significant, perhaps, of the appreciation of an artistic nation of its greatest colourist, that never, in the many mornings Pam had passed in these quiet rooms, had she met anyone she knew, or been disturbed by the chatter of a crowd.

The wonderful little pictures live in a dignified retirement, and sing their silent music chiefly to the ears of shabby little artists and dreamy middle-aged people who walk quietly so as not to disturb the harmonies.

For Turner painted for those people who have not lost all belief in fairyland, and who sometimes, trembling and thrilling, can even yet get half-way back to it over the azure bridge before the clouds close down again and hide it.

There was a fire in the second room, that morning, and nodding to the custodian, Pam unbuttoned her jacket and sat down opposite the little picture of a breaking wave. The room was quiet and but for her empty. Moments passed before the girl moved.

And this is the great wonder and power of the barber's son, who spent his Saturdays and Sundays in horrible rioting out Ratcliff way. He not only feeds one's eyes with nectar and ambrosia, but he touches one's imagination with his

finger, and away that capricious and delicate bit of mental machinery goes, weaving pictures of its own; pictures of things forgotten, and things never seen; writing poetry without words that send down the spine of its possessor the most amazing and exquisite thrills; it puts an end to time and leads one back through centuries that never began and never ended; and then one finds oneself on the azure bridge in mid-air, facing a whirl of golden and rosy clouds that show glimpses of the faëry-land forlorn that, alas! must always disappear before one reaches it.

And Pam was standing on this bridge, breathless and poised like a butterfly, when the custodian came in, keeping an eye on a suspicious-looking individual in a greasy hat and a long cape adapted to the felonious carrying away of small masterpieces.

"Going in to 'ear the sunsets, Miss?" the custodian asked with the comfortable smile of one repeating an ancient and sympathetic joke.

She laughed. "Yes. What a good memory you have!"

"Well, I don't know, Miss, but I've never forgot your saying that, though it must 'ave been nearly ten years ago, I should think."

"Eight. Oh, look, the sun!"

The suspicious-looking cloak having been removed, the custodian returned to the first room, to pull the curtains, and Pam went on.

The wall here is a blaze of colour; sunsets golden and sunsets brazen; Venice all aglow; shining stretches of the Rhône, black-bridged against an apricot sky.

For a blissful hour Pam lived in this enchanted land, quite alone but for the unobjectionable presence of the man with the greasy hat, and then at last while she was, under the guidance of sketch No. 668, in Lucerne, in a black, wet night, gazing out over the water, chilled, and lonely and miserable and rapturous, came the blow. Two ladies and a man came in.

"Oh, these are rather ducky, aren't they?" cried a pretty soprano voice, and the man laughed.

Pam started and turned, and as the man saw her a crimson flush spread over his fat face and he rushed at her. "I say, Pam, this *is* luck,——"

Resignedly, but with flight in her eye, she gave him her hand. "How do you do, Ratty."

"I say, Pam,—you didn't answer my letter,—you look seedy——"

"Shabby, you mean; I'm perfectly well. Don't let me keep you, Ratty." But he set his jaw in a way she remembered, and though his chin was soft and dimpled the bony structure underneath looked obstinate.

"Rot,—do you think I'm going to let you get away now? Well, I'm not."

Appalled, she dashed at the door, but before she could reach it he had made a hurried excuse to his friends, and caught her up.

"I didn't come with 'em," he explained as he hurried along, "I met 'em as they were coming in, and they bagged me—Americans doing the sights. I say, Pam, do be decent to a chap, can't you? And—tell me things."

"I'll tell you one thing. It's abominable of you to follow me when I don't want you."

"But I *do* so want to—to hear about you," he returned piteously.

"Well," she paused on the steps and gazed resignedly at the nearest lion as if regretting its stony inability to come to the rescue by bolting her oppressor, "hurry up, then. What do you want to know? I am very well, Father and Mother are very well, Pilgrim is very well."

Maxse stuck out his chin again. "As if I cared about your father and mother. Tell me where you live and I'll let you go."

She opened her umbrella, for the sun had gone, and a fine rain was falling. "Shall I give you a false address? I am much tempted, you know, just to get rid of you."

"Not you. I know you better than that. Where do you live?"

"In a house."

"You will let me look you up, won't you? I'll only come when you let me, honour bright. *When* may I come?"

Suddenly a spirit of hilarity bobbed up in the girl and she burst out laughing. "Never, Ratty dear, never. I live in a tenement house in the Mile End Road with some Italians. You'll usually see me sitting on a hurdy-gurdy in a red jacket, but this is my day off——"

"Rot! I tell you I *will* see you," insisted the young man, his heavy face red with a mixture of anger and admiration.

"And I tell you you shall *not*. Listen, Ratty, let me go, and don't bother. I am poor, but perfectly respectable, as

you can see by my clothes, and if I wish to remain in obscurity, surely that's my own affair. I wouldn't tell the Duchess where we live, and I will not tell you. So let's part friends, shall we?"

Ignoring her hand, he put up his umbrella.

"I've been looking for you for years, and now I've found you I mean to keep you. Give me your address and I'll let you go. Refuse, and I'll follow you."

"I will not give you my address," she retorted, now thoroughly angry, "and you are perfectly atrocious, as you always were, to torment me. You might at least try to remember that you are a gentleman."

But the days were not far behind him when Ratty had teased for a disinterested love of teasing, and he now followed her down the steps with a malicious grin under his big moustache.

"I've nothing on earth to do, to-day," as she turned to the right and hurried on through the rain, "so I can devote myself entirely to you. You *must* go home when night comes, I suppose!"

She did not answer, but hurried on at such a pace that she was at length obliged to pause to take breath. Then she turned.

"I ought to be vastly flattered by this—devotion," she began, her lips curling wickedly, "but you are such a cumbersome admirer, Ratty. Your methods are so—clumsy! Are you really going to pursue me all day?"

"Yes," he answered, his face changing to sullenness, "I am."

"Then, remembering your pleasant wooing ways of old, I am forced to the conclusion that you are once more going to honour me with an offer of your heart and hand. As usual, I—refuse."

"Better wait till you're asked, hadn't you?" he growled, turning up the collar of his light topcoat, as a raindrop trickled gladly down his heated spine. "I'm *not* going to ask you to marry me,—I got over that nonsense long ago. But you're my cousin——"

"I am now," she interrupted, closing her umbrella, and pointing to the shop before which they stood, "going into this place for a glass of milk and a bun; my humble mid-day meal."

"Then I go too."

"Good. Prepare to be torn to bits, and to smile at the tearers."

They fought their way into the crowded, over-heated room, and after a prolonged struggle Pam succeeded in possessing herself of the desired refreshments and consumed them standing, her wet umbrella under her arm.

"You are my cousin," pursued Maxse, angrily, as someone stamped on his foot, "and I have a right——"

"I am not your cousin at all, in the Eyes of the Law,—which, meaning as it does that I have no cousinly rights over you, also means that you have none over me."

Wiping from her sleeve a sudden libation of coffee poured on it by a red-faced priestess in a white apron, she was about to go on speaking when he interrupted her.

"You used to be so keen on my grandfather,—can't you

realise that he would want me to—to protect you from er—*this?*"

Pam set down her glass and, the heavier for about a pound of what she vulgarly called "fly-bun," paid for her dainty meal, and began insinuating her way towards the door. After all, Ratty was amusing in his very absurdity!

"Now, Ratty," she said, as they emerged triumphantly into the rain, "good-bye. I know you mean to be kind, and I really am—*h'm!*—grateful to you. Only, you know, I am a savage and you must not try to track savages in the bush."

"Tell me your address,—I say, Pam, for the sake of the old days in the country, you know, when we were kids——"

His dogged obstinacy was too much for her scant patience.

"I'll *not* tell you, you horrid little——"

"Then I'll follow you."

"If you do," she cried, white with helpless anger, "I'll lead you such a dance that you'll wish you had never been born!"

"Lead away, you little devil," he growled. And she led.

CHAPTER VI

AS she sped along, untiring, graceful, fleet as a deer, the heavy, hard-breathing Ratty close on her heels, it must be said that Pam, angry though she undoubtedly was, enjoyed herself.

Years ago when he and she were children together at Monks' Yeoland, their rôles had been much the same. The boy in him despising the mere girl in her, while her quick mind compelled from him a certain grudging, captivated admiration, he had always been the pursuer, she the pursued. Bigger, older, stronger than she, he had, as a lamentably fat boy, been infinitely her inferior when it came, as it often did, to questions of speed and endurance, but her quick temper, flaring up as some final straw of idiocy or spite on his part broke the back of her patience, had frequently, contrary to the expectations of them both, given the victory to him.

There was, too, a stodgy obstinacy about Ratty, and a certain cunning that had more than once outmatched the girl's weapons, so that now, as she rushed up the Mall, revolving in her mind all sorts of plans of escape, she experienced again the old thrill of excitement she had so often felt in her childhood.

At Hyde Park Corner she would dart away among the crowd of carriages and 'buses and with a little luck ought to be able to outwit him.

The distance between them was slowly increasing, too, she saw with a quick backward glance, and he was wiping his face with his handkerchief!

"He's pretty well blown," she told herself with satisfaction, as she put on a little more speed.

But at Hyde Park Corner she was obliged to stop to tie her shoe, and as she stooped he came up.

"Upon my word, Pam, you are the most utter rotter I ever knew in my life," he began, still mopping his face. "I suppose you think you're being funny, but you're not."

"Indeed I don't think I'm being funny. I never was in greater earnest in my life, Ratty. My word, but you must be out of condition," she added, getting up, and inspecting his heated face with cruel minuteness, "you look like a boiled lobster. Aren't you afraid of apoplexy?"

"No, I'm not, as it happens. You look like the Witch of Endor, yourself," he returned, "and your hair's coming down. Come, drop this nonsense, and behave like a human being. I take it for granted that Julia Yeoland's story about the Variety stage is not true!"

"Yes it is,—oh, anything is true, Ratty, that would disgust you! Can't you see that you bore me to tears, and can't you let me alone?"

"No, I—won't. You are my—well, most girls would be glad enough to be called cousin, under the circumstances,—and as I happen to want to know where you live,—really, Pam, I don't see why you're so horrid to me!"

Pam, whose eyes were wet with helpless vexation, but

whose sense of justice would not allow her to overlook the pathetic side of this afflicting devotion, held out her hand.

"Look here, Ratty," she said, suddenly gentle, "I am really very much obliged to you for your—for your interest in me, but I do not want to give you my address, and am not going to do it. Can't you be reasonable, and admit that I must have good reasons for living as I do? I've told you that even the Duchess has given up trying to find out. I am quite happy living alone with Pilly, and I don't want ever again to get into touch with the people I used to know when—when I lived with Grandfather. I can't go into details, but it's because I am poor, and for other reasons, and all those people are—dead to me."

But Ratty was unmoved by her appeal. "I ain't dead," he observed stolidly, still holding her hand, "and I promise not to tell Evy or the Duchess——"

"No, you're not dead! You're one of the awful dead who will not die,—one of the bores who never stop boring,—Very well, then," jerking her hand from his warm clasp, "if you insist on being an imbecile, run me to earth if you can!" And away she flew towards Apsley House, dodging horses, 'buses, even an indignant policeman, and on regaining the safety of the pavement almost ran down Piccadilly.

Her plan was fairly subtle, though simple. On reaching the Burlington Arcade she slipped lizard-like through its crowd, and then, turning to her right, doubled back through the Royal Arcade to Piccadilly.

Oh, joy, she had foiled him! His burly figure, as she

looked back, was nowhere to be seen, and as she reached the Piccadilly entrance she stood still for a moment to get breath before her contemplated pounce into a 'bus. And then, her hand arrested in its work of smoothing back a loosened lock of hair, she saw him, lumbering along towards her through the crowd. Despair filled her heart, for in one moment he must see her, and she was at last tired, and evening was coming on, and for Pilgrim's sake she must go home. One more second and he would have seen her, when turning the other way her eyes fell on the large form of an old lady climbing into her brougham, three feet away. The Duchess!

The footman mounted to his place, Ratty drew nearer, he saw Pam and put on speed—almost in one spring Pam reached the carriage, tore open the door and was borne away sitting helplessly in the Duchess's lap, before her pursuer's very eyes.

"Pam! Good Heavens child, how you frightened me!"

Pam tumbled to the seat of the carriage and sat shaking with laughter. "Oh, *did* you see him,—did you see his face?" she cried, wiping her eyes, "and you don't mind my bouncing in on you like that, do you?"

The Duchess, very bulky but elegant in a toilette composed chiefly of ermine and lace, did not mind at all, it appeared. On the contrary she was delighted to see the reprobate Pam under any circumstances, and kissed her affectionately, while she asked "But who was it? And what can you expect if you go to the Burlington Arcade at this time of day?"

Pam straightened her hat and corrected obvious impressions.

"Oh dear, you're all wrong. It was Ratty—Ratty Maxse. For my sins I met him at the National Gallery this morning and he has literally been chasing me all over town, trying to find out my address."

"The Fat Boy?"

"The Fat Boy. Oh, Duchess, he is the most awful person. I should never have had another moment's peace if he had found out where I live, and I've been positively running for hours, he after me hot foot. I haven't laughed so hard for years,—to see his silly face as we drove away. And to think of your appearing just at the right moment like an angel in a chariot——"

The Duchess looked at her shrewdly.

"He used to want to marry you, I remember," she observed, "does he still want to?"

"Yes. He thinks he doesn't, but he does."

"Well, my dear, such faithfulness is very—unusual, and very beautiful. When I think of the trouble Agatha Bennington had to keep Wanwick and Toby Bell up to the scratch! The girls look very well at night, and managed the proposals all right, but Wanwick went off yachting the very next day, and Bell behaved frightfully. They very nearly escaped, I can tell you, both of 'em, and here is this boy sticking to you for years."

"That's just the word; he does 'stick,'" assented Pam, drily. "Faithfulness when it isn't wanted, becomes a vice. The way that wretched youth has bored me amounts to a

social crime, and if he *had* tracked me home I'd have packed up and decamped in the night to escape him. Surely you don't want me to marry him?" she added.

"Of course I don't, but,—well, my dear, you are seven-and-twenty and you have a delicate skin."

"What has my skin,—oh, where are we?"

The carriage had stopped and the footman opened the door trying to look as though he were used to having ladies get out of his carriage who had not to his knowledge, got in.

"Green Street, my dear,—at Henny's. James and she have gone to the country for the day, and I promised to come for a look at Marmy, who has had a cold, poor laddie."

Pam withdrew her arm from the old lady's. "I must be off home now," she said, "or Pilly will be frightened. Thanks so much for rescuing me."

"No, no, I want you to come in with me. I shan't stay more than two minutes and then I'll drive you—anywhere you say. I have several things to tell you."

"I—I can't go in."

The Duchess turned, as the door opened. "My dear Pamela," she said a little sharply, in French, "don't be absurd. I know your ideas, and I will not tell Henrietta that you have been here. So come in and behave yourself."

Thus Pam went into James Peele's house.

CHAPTER VII

IT was a house of "fair and gorgeous building," ornate with *carton pierre* and delicate gilding, rich with brocades and silks, gay with glossy floors and fine rugs. It looked new, though the Peeles had lived in it for eight years.

While they waited in the drawing-room, the Duchess asked Pam how she liked it.

"It looks—expensive," answered the girl truthfully.

"So it is. Too new, too, don't you think? That's Henny, she hates shabby things,—so ill-bred of her, I always think, though she *is* my daughter! She never had much taste, poor dear, except for dress. And as for Jim,—he never says a word, and I think if she chose to furnish the house in barley-sugar he wouldn't care."

"Is he so—good-natured?" Pam stood at the far end of the long room, looking at a portrait lighted by clusters of electric water-lilies.

"Well,—not exactly what I should call good-natured, but—it amounts practically to the same thing. I sometimes think she'd like it better if he were not quite so—easy-going."

"H'm! This is a beautiful portrait of her. When was it done?"

"The winter before last. Sargent. Aren't the pearls amazing. Oh, yes, it's good, but you remember her when she was younger, though not when she was quite young."

"When I knew her she was the most beautiful woman

I ever dreamed of," cried Pam, "and everyone said she was the most beautiful woman in England!"

Pam had not seen Lady Henrietta Peele for nine years, but the memory of her and her amazing loveliness was so interwoven with her own most poignant joy and pain, that her voice quivered as she spoke. "I am sorry—it is going"—she added, to cover her own emotion. "The beauty, I mean."

"Ah, yes. It is sad," returned the old lady. "One of the many advantages of plainness is that the tragic waning of beauty never comes to its possessor."

"Does she—mind?" asked Pam, in a low voice.

The Duchess rose and waddled to her with the graceless speed of a seal on land. "My dear,—yes, she does. *For him.* That is the tragedy. She thinks he minds, and he doesn't even notice!"

Before Pam had time to answer a fresh-faced woman in the costume of a trained nurse came into the room and informing Her Grace that Master Marmaduke had already, because of a slight cold, been put to bed, Pam found herself, a moment later, going upstairs in this house she had never thought to enter.

Her hand slid up the broad balustrade *his* so often touched, her feet trod where his trod nearly every day of his life. She passed doors he opened daily, and followed the nurse and the Duchess into the big, airy, up-to-date night nursery.

Behind a green paper screen on which, in oval white panels rosy-faced children consumed bread-and-milk, prayed,

and slept, stood the bed, and it was James Peele's child, this little, pale, big-eyed creature who politely sat up at their approach, and did the honours with weary dignity.

"How d'you do, Granny dear."

"How d'you do, my love? I hope Granny's boy is well," answered the old woman sitting down and taking his hand in hers.

"I am not very well, thank you. I have caught another cold, haven't I, Miss Arnott?"

Pam stood at the foot of the bed looking gravely at the child.

"Whom does he look like, Pam?" asked the Duchess.

"Like—his father."

"Who is that lady, Granny dear?" Marmy's deep-set grey eyes were fixed on Pam's face.

"A friend of Granny's, dear love, who is very fond of little boys!"

"Are you an aunt?" pursued Marmaduke, mildly bent on following out his investigations. Pam laughed. "No, not an aunt, nor even a cousin," she said gently. "Will you tell me how old you are?"

Marmy was six. Yes, he liked dolls, and he liked soldiers. No, he was not going to be a soldier, because walking made him tired.

He answered her questions most civilly, and asked Miss Arnott to get her a chair, but Pam walked away to the fire and left him alone with his grandmother.

"He's a dear little boy," she said to the nurse, "I am sorry he has a cold."

"Yes, I am very fond of him. This cold is nothing, but —we have to be very careful of him."

Pam was silent, and stood looking sombrely into the fire, which threw strange flickering shadows over her face and splashed her dark and muddy skirt with crimson.

Suddenly the Duchess, who had wrapped the child in a blanket, and taken him on her lap, called out with a laugh, "Pam, your hair is tumbling down and you show other signs of your turbulent day. Miss Arnott will take you into Henny's rooms for repairs."—As the door closed behind them Pam heard the old woman's voice raised in a funny uncertain kind of singing.

"It's 'Old Uncle Ned,'" explained the nurse, turning the lights on and flooding the room with a soft light; "he's very fond of it, and always makes Her Grace sing it."

And this was Henrietta Peele's room, this big room hung in pale blue; this dressing-table glass in which her own haggard little face was reflected was the one in which *she* looked every day; the jewelled hat-pin on the satin cushion was *hers;* the comb Pam had taken up combed *her* hair.

As if in a dream the girl took off her hat, and taking a big silver brush, smoothed with it the glossy dark hair that grew so neatly on her blue-veined temples.

"There was an old nigger, and his name was Uncle Ned," —came the old voice from the next room.

The face in the glass was so wan and monkey-like that its owner started and began to talk without a very clear idea of what she was saying. "Is he really so delicate,—little Marmaduke?"

The nurse, who had opened a door and lighted the dressing-room, hesitated. "Well, he's not strong. No organic trouble, you know, but—great constitutional delicacy. Would you like to wash your hands?" And then while Pam washed her hands in Henrietta Peele's basin and dried them on Henrietta Peele's lace-trimmed towel, the nurse went on, "I very much doubt the wisdom of keeping him in town these next three months. Of course, it's no business of mine, and I can't say anything, but—February and March are dreadful months for delicate children. The doctor says there will be no danger, but——"

"But you think there will be?"

Pam was pinning on her hat, well down over her telltale eyes, at the dressing-table.

"I think he would be—safer, in a better climate. Please do not say I said so, because—I have no right to express an opinion but—if the Duchess could be made to see, she might convince Lady Henrietta."

"But I thought Lady Henrietta was always so anxious."

"She is. But,—they did think of going to the south of France, but Mr. Peele can't get away, and—I fancy Lady Henrietta would dislike going without him,——"

"I understand. But I fear I can't do anything in the matter. I very rarely see the Duchess, and I have not seen Lady Henrietta for years. If I were you I should speak quite frankly to either her or—Mr. Peele."

The Duchess had put the little boy into bed, when Pam went back to her, and the concert was over.

"Good-bye, my darling," the old lady said, kissing the child, "Granny dear will come again to-morrow."

"Good-bye, Granny dear. Good-bye," he added to Pam, giving her his hand, and putting up his face for the kiss he did not want. She shook hands with him, but did not kiss him.

Twenty minutes later on top of a homeward-bound 'bus, next a lady with an uncorked gin-bottle under her shawl, she sat full of the misery of memory.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER thus having brought Pam, within a few weeks, in touch with Ratty, the Duchess, and, indirectly, with Peele and his wife, Fate withdrew his finger from the girl's particular pie, and a month passed unmarked by any event whatsoever.

Haunted for days by memories of Peele's house and his child, tormented by the persistent recurrence of things that for years had lain fallow in her mind, forced by a malicious demon to go over old scenes, recall old words, reconstruct dead-and-gone events, she plunged herself, as was her wont in such circumstances, headlong into an environment as different as possible from that from which she wished to turn her thoughts.

During the dull days while Pilgrim sat frowsting over the fire, the girl, with a set face and sternly watchful eyes, tramped about the lowly streets of the neighbourhood and tried to interest herself in the humble affairs of their inhabitants.

And of course, little by little, she succeeded in her honest endeavour, and won back the contented calm out of which her visit to Green Street had shaken her.

She had never hoped to be able to forget James Peele and the events connected with him, but time had dimmed and taken the bitterness from those memories, to such an extent that she had not only been distressed but terrified by the

strength with which they had revived, and it had taken all her courage to fight, and conquer the obsession. But when the ghost again lay silent, and she had given herself a last lecture on the subject, she went her way watching life among the poor people with the sympathy and forbearance that lay in her, and that would always prevent custom from hardening, or frequent disillusion embittering her.

She was no slummer. She was shy of asking questions, and shrank from hard words, and there were many things that seemed to her the exclusive right of others than herself. But in spite, or possibly because of these things, she met with no rudeness in her wanderings, and had several acquaintances, almost to be ranked as friends, in the purlieus of Seven Dials, and had long ago learned a good many things that, assimilated unconsciously, without pedagogy, give to an intelligent mind that quickness of understanding and breadth of view the peculiar quality of which is best expressed as "knowing how to put yourself into another's place."

As nearly as may be for a childless woman Pam knew, one wet January evening, what must be the agony of a mother whose child had just died of starvation, and also how a sorrow-crazed brain can come to the point of conceiving revenge against those brutal rich people who could help and do not.

It was she who helped a neighbour hold the mad-woman until ropes could be brought, and later, when the poor creature's dangerous despair had dwindled to a moaning lethargy, it was Pam who rushed away and came back with

empty pockets, and a white frock for the dead child, and flowers to close into its little fingers. The mother did not thank her, the neighbours rather ignored her, but they suffered her presence as an equal, and she knew that that was much.

For years she had lived among people who, poor as she was, looked on her as rich, and she had learned, quite unconsciously, to treat each man as a man, each woman as a woman, and not as a more or less respectable suit of clothes or dress, and little by little they learned to treat her in the same way.

By nature fastidious, she disliked evil smells and unpleasant sights as much as the finest of fine ladies, but it lay in her to love life, and anything that is real is life, and anything that is real is endurable, so that without any distinct bias towards good works, she had gradually lost certain educated horrors and hatreds, and got in touch with her neighbours.

And now they had unconsciously helped her in her hour of very real need, by occupying her mind and turning her thoughts outward. Inbreeding is as bad in things mental as in things physical, and this she escaped.

Late in February arrived a false and deceiving, but for the time very delightful period of Spring weather, and then, forcing the lazy Pilgrim to go with her, the girl made long expeditions on 'buses,—"everybody's carriage" as "de Amicis" calls the tram. And while Pilgrim, grimly respectable in her beaded mantle and bonnet with a bunch of pansies on it, sat as silent as what she called the Spink,

Pam amused herself by talking to any of her neighbours who might look promising.

They went to Camden Heath, they went to Islington, they went to Hampstead. They drank tea at those delightful suburbs, Pam once even disgraced Pilgrim by eating a bun on the 'bus coming back from Ealing. And for all practical purposes a 'bus is as good as a four-in-hand.

It was on the way to Kilburn that she made friends with an old man who had been in the charge at Balaclava. And friends they remained until he died, and she went to his funeral at Lower Tooting and was snubbed by his sour-faced daughter-in-law who audibly referred to her as "father's lady friend."

Thus, by the end of February, Pam had again settled down into her way's quiet tenor, and was contented and happy. Her absurd novelettes which appeared, as she had told the Duchess, in a pale-blue periodical, brought her ten guineas apiece, and she was enabled, by long practice, to reel them off as fast as she could write.

Her method was simple. First came the list of names:—

Elfrida Bellingham—Heroine.
Sir Lionel Beaufort—Hero.
Dowager Countess of Wandsworth—Bullying villainess.
Dr. Kane—Her tool, in love with Elfrida.
Countess de Préaux—Adventuress, in love with Lionel.
Retainers, cottagers, guests, etc., ad. lib.

Wise enough to employ all the old tricks that invariably

delight the public to which *The Lady's Own* caters, she would thus begin.

Elfrida, always beautiful and usually blonde, was of either giddily high or pathetically humble origin.

Sir Lionel, a Greek God in knickers, his broad chest a perfect storehouse of noble sentiments, always fell in love with Elfrida at first sight, and his love, though fiery, was ever divested of the slightest touch of the earthy. Then there was the purse-proud and ambitious dowager and her vile slave, the doctor (learned in poisons and utterly unscrupulous), and the adventuress, almost invariably, in conformance with the good old English superstition that no Englishwoman ever was anything so base, French or Italian. And the tale worked out to the worsting of the wicked, the glittering triumph of the good characters. Alas, that life is not so simple!

Then, while Lionel clasped Elfrida in his manly arms,—quick curtain.

Utter rubbish, these stories, ridiculous in plot, faulty in construction,—in a word devoid of all but one of the characteristics of the real novelists. The people described, impossible and absurd as they were in act, were in their manner and conversation, alive.

The first story, written to amuse herself, after reading a similar tale in the same paper, lent Pilgrim by the landlady in Montague Place, and sent to the Editor as a wild experiment, in a sudden hour of need, had, to Pam's great surprise, been accepted, and finding it an easy matter to ring the necessary changes on the primary plot, and a pleas-

ant one to get at first six and then ten guineas for the stories, she had naturally enough continued writing.

And writing for a particular public she had wisely kept strictly to her model, but her sense of humour was so keen that even as she wrote her preposterous pot-boilers she poked fun at herself and indulged in quips and gentle jeers in a way that in time had grown to be a distinct and very popular mannerism. And not many people can boast of having written twenty-two novels in six years!

CHAPTER IX

"GOOD evening, officer."

"Good evening, Miss."

"How is your old church to-day?"

Officer Brown, huge, and bland with the sweet atmosphere of authority that hung over him, smiled at the question and the questioner.

"My old church is very well, thank you, Miss, and the new grass is beginning to come up in the Cloisters. You 'aven't been round for a long time, Miss. Not been ill, I 'ope?"

"No, thanks, but—the winter has been long. I am glad spring is coming."

Pam had come through Old Dean's Yard, after a long prowl in Great Peter Street, where she had some banana-selling friends with whom she enjoyed an occasional chat in their own tongue. She had also stood for half an hour in Vincent Square, watching the Westminster schoolboys playing football, and then, suddenly tired, had come for a rest in the old Cloister.

It was the middle of March, and a mild, warm day; the kind of day that insidiously encourages in one and all the poor, wee sprouts of summer sentiments that the next cold night will nip in the bud.

As the girl disappeared through the old black door, Officer Brown looked after her. "That's a very pleasant lady,"

he remarked to a friend who had come in to see him. "I've known her for years, and she always 'as a pleasant word."

"She must ha' been pretty, too," returned the friend, who had an eye for a woman, and had liked Pam's way of walking. But the policeman shook his head.

"Well, no; not pretty. Too pale for my taste, and too thin, too. A waist as I could take in my 'and, and I don't like that. But very pleasant, very pleasant, indeed," he added, unconsciously quoting the newest of our immortal Williams.

"Married?" asked the friend, chewing a blade of grass.

"You've got me there, 'Enry. I'm blest if I know. I never seen 'er with any man,—nor with any woman, neither, for that matter. She's always alone and always civil; that's all I know,—except that she looks lonely as well as alone, don't she? Comes every two or three months and prowls about like a mouse, reading the inscriptions, and so on. And always very pleasant."

Meantime Pam had gone part way down the side of the Cloister by which one enters, and then, very tired, leaned against the stone-work, her back to the quadrangle, to rest.

At her feet slept Nuzio Clementi, called the father of the pianoforte, as the tablet attested.

It was cool and damp under the blackened arches, and so quiet. The immense rhythmical quiet of the great abbey is a wonderful thing, and it seemed to the girl that she had reached in a sea of noise an island in beating against whose shores the waves were struck dumb. Where was London and its clamour?

She was overtired and nervous, and there was a plaintive loneliness in the moist spring air. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears, and with an impatient shake of her head she rose and walked on.

"You need a tonic," she told herself, scornfully, "iron and cod-liver oil!"

Turning to the right, she had just passed the Chapter House door, when a soft whirring of most melodious bells filled the air like a sound of angelic wings, and she stood still, gazing out on the young greenness of the grass. It was, then, three o'clock.

"No wonder I felt tearful," she thought, shaking her head to clear away the tears; "I forgot all about lunch! Oh, for a bun!" And she walked on blindly, for she had no handkerchief, and her gloves were not clean.

And when her eyes were dry, she looked up to find herself face to face with a man: with Lamartine! Lamartine of the foggy day in Berkeley Square, Lamartine of the pawnshop. He had recognised her as soon as he saw her, and while she tried to look as though she had never before seen him, he took off his hat,—only a bowler, this time, but a beautiful, beautiful bowler,—and said, quietly, "I have not seen you for a long time."

Before she could summon up an appropriate answer, he went on: "The first time, you know, was in a beastly fog in Berkeley Square, near Mount Street, and the second time was at Cornwall's, where you were pawning a ring."

Somehow his simple facing of the ring affair seemed to set Pam instantly at her ease.

"Yes," she returned; "and you were looking at a little shagreen box; did you buy it?"

He smiled, and the peculiarity of his smile was that it in no way disturbed the serene beauty of his mouth, though it was a genuine expression of feeling and no mere muscular contraction.

"Yes, I bought it; it is a delightful little box,—very excellent shagreen. You like this place?"—waving a slim hand in a dogskin glove with a little proprietary air that did not escape the dark eyes watching him.

"Yes, I love it. And you?"

"I, too," he answered, simply. "I love old quietude like this, and I come here very frequently. It is strange that we have not met before, for you, too, come often?"

She shook her head. "Not very, for I live far away, but I love this old Cloister."

His dark-blue clothes were faultless, she saw, the ends of his turned-down collar met with an accuracy which surely no other collar on earth could boast, and under it a bit of scarlet silk flashed in the gathering dusk. Boots? Of course, the most perfect brown ones ever seen. And yet she could not set him down as a dandy as, his glass in his eye, he stood leaning towards her with a near-sighted eagerness. And again she realised that it was because his face so absolutely dominated the rest of him, and standing close to him as she did, she had to deliberately measure him with her eye to learn that he was barely, if quite, as tall as she herself.

"Jane Lister, dear childe," he was murmuring, as she came to this conclusion, and for a moment she stared at him,

thinking that he had mistaken her for someone else, until he continued, turning toward the wall, "I am very fond of dear Jane Lister; are not you?"

And she, following his eyes, understood. "Jane Lister, dear childe," was cut into a tablet opposite them.

For a moment she did not answer; not because there was any constraint between her and the little exquisite with the high-bred pink and white face, but because there was not.

It seemed so absolutely natural that he and she should be standing there in the gathering dusk, dreaming a little dream about the child buried a hundred years ago.

Presently their eyes met, and he spoke. "I am Jean de Lensky, of the Russian Embassy," he said, "Second Secretary. You will let me know your name?"

"Pamela Yeoland, Miss Yeoland."

He laughed. "Ah, yes, *Miss,* of course. I knew that."

"Did you?" asked Pam, bluntly; "how?"

"How can I tell? An atmosphere, perhaps, an aura. You know the Duchess of Wight well?"

"How do you know that I know her at all?"

"Because the first time I saw you you had just come from her house."

"Do you know her?"

"I was on my way to lunch with her that day," he explained, adding, patiently, "Do you know her well?"

"No,—yes. That is, I very rarely see her,—as I daresay she told you."

Neither of them noticed that she was assuming an interest in her on his part, but he answered emphatically, raising his

almost invisible eyebrows in delicate protestation, "I asked the Duchess nothing. I did not mention you to her."

"There would have been no harm, surely, if you had. It would have been quite natural, if—if you wanted to know my name."

"I did; but I preferred that you should tell me yourself."

"How did you know,"—they had turned and were going slowly back towards Old Dean's Yard, and she finished her question in silence.

"Ah, yes, I knew. You mean how did I know that we should meet?" Leaning towards her, so near that his face almost touched hers, he smiled. "I was sure. And I was right, as you see. Didn't you know?" he added, naïvely.

She laughed. "No. But I remembered you, and recognised you at once, that day at Cornwall's."

"Yes. London is small," pursued M. de Lensky, as he followed her, to the open-mouthed astonishment of Officer Brown, into the Yard.

"Small!"

"Yes. We others,—*nous autres,*—we go always to the same places, and meet always, sooner or later."

Pam burst out laughing, as they walked towards the door leading into the Broad Sanctuary.

"But I am not one of '*vous autres*'," she declared; "I am very poor, and live quite beyond the pale, and know no one."

"Except the Duchess of Wight," he amended, walking sideways, the better to see her.

"Except the Duchess of Wight. And I hadn't seen her,

until that day, for years. And I shall probably not see her again for ages!"

"That is of course just as you choose, Miss Yeoland."

They had reached the gate, and he took off his hat.

"You will let me come to see you?"

There was in his perfect manner not one trace of consciousness that their relations were unusual, or that his request might possibly be refused, and after a barely perceptible hesitation she answered in the same way. "Yes, I shall be very glad to have you come. 43 Huntley Street, Russell Square. Can you remember?"

From his pocket he produced a small leather book, with his initials and a small coronet on it in gold, and wrote down the address in the most minute and accurate of hands.

"At what time shall I be most likely to find you at home," he asked.

"After five, almost any day."

"Then,—*au plaisir.*"

Gravely they shook hands and separated.

CHAPTER X

FORTY-THREE Huntley Street, Russell Square, was to put it mildly, a very queer place to which to invite a secretary to a great Embassy. And when the secretary was, like Jean de Rensky, a dandy, a man of habits as dainty as those of some petted Persian cat, a member of a great family and an habitué of that portion of English society whose lives are the most luxurious lived by any people on this broad earth, the queerness of the place seemed positively grotesque.

The house was worse than shabby, for in its far-off best days it had never risen to anything higher than the cheap tawdry, and now, in its decadence, was piteously unpleasant, with its torn carpets, its stained walls, its stale air, and its all-pervading odour of food.

On the ground-floor dwelt one Mr. Bingle, who travelled in whisky, and as, unfortunately, whisky with lamentable frequency also travelled in him, he was not the kind of person one would choose to introduce to an immaculate young swell.

There was also a Mrs. Bingle, whose appearance, it was to be hoped, was against her.

Upstairs were to be found two ladies in the millinery-line in Tottenham Court Road: Miss Vesey, and Miss Greene-with-an-E.

Mrs. Kingdom, the landlady, was no doubt in possession of convincing private information regarding the morals of

these ladies, otherwise they could never have forced the sacred portals of 43,—for 43 was very respectable,—but Miss Vesey had highly peroxided hair and a manner of suspicious dignity, and Miss Greene-with-an-E's elaborately painted face was somewhat awful in its affability. There were, besides, a gentleman who travelled in hygienic flannels, another who marcelled heads in an Oxford Street shop, a girl who did typewriting for a firm in Queen Victoria Street, and a young man by the name of Hodge, whose avocation was a mystery.

Now if Pam had held herself proudly aloof from contaminating contact with her fellow-lodgers they would not have mattered so much, but it was not in her to hold herself aloof from anyone, so she knew all of these objectionable people, and even a good deal about their private affairs.

Mrs. Bingle, Miss Greene-with-an-E, and the gentleman who travelled in flannels, came occasionally to her rooms and confided their troubles to her, and in return she had visited the two ladies, admired the photographs on their mantelpieces, and guessed the price of their new frocks.

She had also been told by the mysterious Mr. Hodge,—a gentleman who took all his meals out, and whose shoes, in striking contrast to the rest of his belongings, were invariably almost new and beautifully cared for—of his engagement to a lady temporarily in service in Hastings, and she had once had a very hilarious tea-party, in honour of the coming of Mr. Tavistock's three little boys, who, being motherless, lived with an aunt in Mida Vile. Mr. Tavistock was the traveller in hygienic flannels.

"You are as friendly as a puppy," Pilgrim used to tell her mistress, "and 'ow you can stand their vulgar ways I can't see, when I think of your mamma."

And then Pam would laugh and remind her that her father, before he had discovered his voice and become Guy Sacheverel, had, as George Kennedy, lived in a Bloomsbury boarding-house, very contentedly.

Thus, things being what they were, Pam had known perfectly well, when she told de Lensky that he might come to see her, that he would, if seen, awaken great excitement and curiosity among the boarders, and that there was every chance of one of the young ladies coming into her room during his visit on some artless errand, such as the loan of some bird-seed, or the return of a borrowed reel of silk.

As a rule, of course, the house was pretty well empty until evening, but Saturday was coming, and on that afternoon Miss Vesey and Miss Greene-with-an-E were much given to loose-attired repose against the dissipations of the evening. So probably, permission to call having been given to him on Wednesday, he would come on Saturday and encounter one or both of these ladies as he came upstairs. Pam, however, gave this horrid contingency only the tribute of a smile.

She knew he would come, and that she would be glad to see him; she knew that she liked him extremely, and that he liked her.

And these were the things that mattered. The circumstance of her living in a third-rate boarding-house was an external detail that did not deserve a thought, he being what she instinctively knew that he was.

So on Saturday she expected him, and when he did not come on that day, or the next, she was surprisingly disappointed. Monday passed, and Tuesday, and then, on Wednesday afternoon, just a week from the day when she had met him, he came. She had quite given him up, and was kneeling by the fire toasting a muffin when he arrived.

Black-armed Mildred flung open the door and announced the fascinating stranger, who might have come straight from the pages of Miss Yeoland's latest story, in a voice husky with excitement.

"'Ere's a gentleman, Miss."

And then in her agony of delight she shut the door on a bit of his beautiful coat-tail and bolted downstairs, leaving him to extricate himself as best he could.

Pam burst out laughing and he joined her quite unembarrassed as he opened the door and liberated his outraged garment. Then they shook hands and sat down.

"I hope I haven't come too soon?" he asked. "I was very keen on seeing you again!"

And with an inward blush she realised that the time that had seemed so long to her had quite naturally seemed to him, with his pleasure-crowded days, very short.

"I am glad you have come," she answered. "Do you like muffins?"

"I do. I was dining with the Duchess the other night," he went on, watching her gravely as she bent over the fire, "and Lady Chesney was there. I had not known before that you were her cousin."

"Our mothers were sisters."

"So she said."

"Have you known Evelyn long?"

"Yes; for about a year, that is. She is very beautiful, I find."

"Yes; she is really lovely. Is she—well?"

"Oh, very, I should say. *C'est le plus pur type Anglais.* She was telling about the times when you were children in the country; about your monkey,—what was his name? Ah, yes, Caliban; about the actor whom you loved; about your reciting poetry, and about your running away with your old nurse——"

Pam frowned, as the door opened, and Pilgrim came in with tea.

"I wish Evelyn wouldn't tell about me," she said, impatiently. Lensky inspected Pilgrim as she prepared the table and put the kettle on the fire. "She was not talking to me," he remarked, as the old woman left the room, with no signs of the violent perturbation into which his unexpected presence had thrown her. "She was talking to Mr. Peele. I wish I could have seen Peele's wife in her youth," he added, as she buttered the muffin, "she must have been surpassingly beautiful."

Pam looked up, her eyes glinting in the firelight, her cheeks pink.

"She was wonderful. You seem to be very keen on good looks."

"I am. A beautiful woman is the most perfect feast in the world for my eyes."

She made the tea and poured it out; he drank his slowly,

leaning over towards her, his elbow on his knee, his eyes fixed on her face, which, in consideration of his recent declaration, she wished were less plain.

"Was that Pilgrim?" he asked, presently.

"Yes. She was very ill in the summer, and I was so frightened! If she had died I should have been altogether alone!"

His face changed, as if he were about to speak, but he said nothing, and after a moment rose and walked to the table where the photographs stood. "The Duchess mentioned your mother," he said, taking up the crimson frame. "You are not at all like her."

Pam burst out laughing as Pilgrim came in and began clearing away the tea-table. "I should think I was not! She was not perfect, like Lady Henrietta, but—ah, she was just exquisite. Such hair, such tender eyes, such a mouth,—Lady Henrietta took everyone's breath away, but everyone fell in love with my mother."

"Yes; I understand. I find you a little like your father, though. He is dark?"

"Yes. But I'm not really like him; I'm a freak; am I not, Pilly?"

But Pilgrim, whose tongue was very free indeed before any one of the boarders who might come to see her mistress, had too good old servant's blood in her not to recognise Lensky for what he was, and Pam's familiar question met, to her amusement, merely with a prim "I'm sure I can't say, Miss Pam," before the old woman left the room.

"Poor old Pilly!" Pam opened a window, for the day

was warm, though wet, and sat down in the arm-chair, her glossy hair gleaming against the flowered chintz.

Lensky drew his chair very near hers, and, leaning forward so that his face was only a few inches away, studied her with serious intentness. He was so near that she could observe the delicate texture of his white skin, the silky fineness of his straw-coloured hair; there was in his large, smooth-lidded eyes an expression of almost angelic sweetness and simplicity.

For what seemed a long time he sat in silence, looking at her, and then, as she moved uneasily, he drew back a little.

"You will not mind my coming so close to you," he said, gently, "for I am so near-sighted that even with my glass I see very little, and without it I am quite blind!"

Taking the glass, to which there was no string, from his eye, he turned his gaze on her again. "So! Now I see nothing."

From the street below came a sudden burst of music,—a piano-organ, jocund and soulless, playing an elaborately syncopated cake-walk.

Pam rose and went to the window. The rain had ceased, and a barrow of yellow flowers seemed to have caught a ray of sun and held it fast.

"Is that your hansom?" she asked, suddenly.

"Yes."

It had occurred to her that she had not been in a hansom for over five years; that she would like to put on a pretty frock and go softly jerking along the wet street through the kindling lights——

Lensky had come up behind her and stood looking down into the street, as she was doing.

"Did Caliban die?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I was wondering,—afterwards; when I got home, I mean. Wondering how, if he did die, you managed to bury him."

Pam turned. "How—kind of you to think of that," she cried, as the music, with a final arabesque of glittering notes, ceased. "Well,—I *drowned* him. I carried him to Westminster Bridge and dropped him in——"

The piano-organ was now playing "Bill Baily," and in an opposite window an old man sat listening, a curly-headed child on his knee.

When Lensky had gone, Pam stood for a long time looking out into the dusk.

CHAPTER XI

LENSKY came once more before March had moistly melted into April, and then, towards the middle of the latter month, he sent a big box of roses, with a note explaining that a sudden illness of his mother was calling him to Poland.

"It will console me to think," he wrote, in his beautiful little hand that was so like Thackeray's, "that you have honoured me with your friendship, and that when I come back I shall find you sitting in your room so high above the street, just as I left you. You will have read *La Tache d'Encre* and the other books, and we will discuss them, and you will make tea, and Pilgrim will come in and out,—all just as before.

"You are English, and I am a Pole, yet you will know what I mean when I say that we are of the same nationality, and I shall always remember with felicity that day when, through the fog, I first saw your face.

"Until my return, I hope in the middle of May, I beg you then to hold in kind remembrance

"Yours affectionately,

"JEAN DE LENSKY."

That he signed himself, without permission, in this way was, she told herself, quaintly characteristic of him. It was quite evident that his feelings for her were of an affectionate

nature, and therefore it never occurred to him to use any other formula.

For his absolute truthfulness did not stop at the truthfulness of mere words, but was the very mainspring of his nature, thus directing his every act.

Pam had once been greatly amused when, on the occasion of his second visit, Mrs. Bingle had come in on some flimsy pretext, and on being civilly received had sat down and proceeded to try to find out from Lensky certain things that had, since his first appearance in the house, greatly exercised the minds of its inhabitants.

"Very pleasant for Miss Yeoland to 'ave 'er friends running in to see 'er," she began.

Lensky bowed.

"An old friend, too,—as Mrs. Pilgrim was saying——"

Lensky smiled.

"I dessay you used to know 'is late Lordship, the Earl?"

Lensky spoke.

"No," he said.

But Mrs. Bingle possessed a considerable amount of determination, and her pride forbade her returning to Miss Vesey's room unfilled with the information she had volunteered to get.

"'Ow do you like London?" she pursued, playing with her watch-chain. Lensky was devoted to London, and said so, without adding any further remarks.

"French, aren't you?"

Pam, much diverted, refused to help him out. There

was, after all, no harm in Mrs. Bingle's questions, and if he did not choose to answer them he might evade them for himself.

"No, I am not French."

"German?"

"No."

Now Mrs. Bingle, though deeply respecting Pam's connection with a deceased Earl, and given to vague boastings about her intimacy with her aristocratic fellow-boarder, knew that Pam was very poor, and lived, for whatever reason it might be, quite cut off from her former West-End friends.

So when Lensky refused to gratify the good woman's curiosity, she grew very angry.

"I ain't useder being treated like dirt under people's feet," she exclaimed, rising, "and though you look like a swell, you can't be much of a one or you wouldn't be a-coming *'ere*. Them as put on airs better stick to Park Line and not come where they're not wanted!"

Lensky, foreseeing in her anger disagreeable consequences for Pam, smiled bewitchingly at the outraged matron, and after a moment's hesitation she smiled back.

"Not *Eye*-talian?" she persisted.

He smiled.

"Rooshian?"

He smiled.

"Polish?"

He smiled.

"Spanish?"

He smiled.

And seeing that he succeeded, without saying one word except good-bye, in smiling her downstairs in a state of perfect good humour, could diplomacy have gone further?

And Pam knew instinctively that whereas he might not always, in the face of impertinent questioning, find it wise to smile, he would invariably present to the questioner as impenetrable a front as he had to the indomitable Mrs. Bingle, and come out of the engagement without either having given any information or having uttered a single misleading word.

Pam enjoyed his flowers, missed him, and, as he had asked her to do, held him in kind remembrance.

May came; a long, vaguely homesick month, as it often is to the imaginative, and one afternoon, a week past the date when Lensky had hoped to return, she went to see the Duchess. The old lady, whom she found in bed with a headache, was delighted to see her.

"I am glad you have come, dear. I have been wretched for weeks,—with my eyes, I am sure, though they say I am bilious. I have these headaches continually, and might as well have been in Timbuctoo for all the good I've had of the season. How are you?"

Pam sat down by the bed and took off her hat. It was very cool and pleasant in the big room, and the walk had been long.

"I am well,—only I hate the Spring. How is Evy? I passed her the other day in Regent Street, and thought her looking ill."

"Yes,—she had the measles, poor dear, but she's going

about again now. I was to dine there last night, but couldn't. Have you seen the Fat Boy lately?"

"No, thank heaven."

"The last time I saw him he told me you were a little cat, and he hoped he'd never see you as long as he lives."

"He lies," returned Pam, calmly.

The Duchess laughed. "Well, I hope he won't take to gambling in his despair."

"Gambling?"

"Yes. It appears that he was taken up with Willy Elphinstone, the Hetley men, and that lot. They all gamble, and as for Jack Lensky, everybody knows that he'd stake the coat on his back if he had nothing else."

"Jack Lensky!"

"Yes. He's one of the Russian Embassy men,—an enchanting creature, too. I met him about a year ago and have been in a mild way very attentive to him ever since. Delightful! He has a way of whispering a naughty story and looking too good for this world while he does it! And then he's clever, has been everywhere, seen everything,—and done everything, too, no doubt, if the truth were known. An entrancing young man, in a word, but by no means a good friend for poorish youths with a taste for extravagant amusements."

For a moment Pam was silent. If she avowed her acquaintance with Lensky, not only would her old friend's amazement and outcry be great, but Pam would be for the future unjustified in keeping her way and place of living a secret. The Duchess would with much logic ask her: "if

this young man comes to see you, why can't I?" So she said nothing, and listened silently as the old lady went on: "But he wouldn't hurt you, my dear, and I wish you knew him! With all his wildness and wicked ways, he's such a gentleman! Fast Englishmen are so apt to be boorish, and this man is so—exquisite, in everything he does and says. Lady Hoagland,—you know, the pious Lady Hoagland, with the huge wart on her nose,—told me that once he was let into her house by mistake when she was out, and only Ursula, the youngest girl, was at home. When she, Mary, came in she found him at the piano, singing the most fascinating French nursery songs to the child!"

"Oh!" said Pam, absently.

"He is very devoted, in his way, to Evelyn," pursued the old lady innocently, "but he is also devoted to Alys Compton and the second Hammersley girl. There were also tales—but they wouldn't interest you. I heard one yesterday," she added, with a chuckle, "that I mean to ask him about to-night."

"Oh,—he is in town, then?"

The Duchess did not notice the slip of the tongue.

"Yes; he has been in Poland, but got back last week. Oh, Pam, if you weren't such a little idiot, you'd dine here to-night and meet him!"

But Pam only laughed, and shortly afterwards took her departure.

CHAPTER XII

A BREATHLESS day in mid-August; a day when the humid air hung heavy over the town, when people walked wearily, children cried with feeble querulousness, and the backs of the suffering horses gleamed as if varnished in the pitiless sun.

Pam, with whom funds were distressingly low, had been unable to get out of town at all that summer, and only by the greatest economy had she managed to send Pilgrim for a fortnight's sea-air at Margate, where a friend of the old servant had married a green-grocer and took lodgers.

So for the last two weeks Pam had been entirely alone, and Pilgrim had returned only the day before, much improved in health, but inclined to be scornful of town and impatient of its August discomforts. Her tales of the delicious breezes at Margate, the moonlit sea, even of the shrimps she had had with her tea, seemed to Pam to make the heat, the lassitude, the hopelessness of London almost unbearable.

The girl herself was not well, though she did not know it, and set her querulousness and lack of energy down to an unworthy discontent and idleness.

The sitting-room, which in summer suffered from the southern exposure that was its boon in winter, was stiflingly warm, and Pam sat, with her blouse open at the throat, at the window, while Pilgrim, without any front hair, discoursed about Margate.

"I used to 'ave to close my window by six," she said, proudly; "it got so cool."

"Did you, Pilly? How nice."

"And we used to 'ave bits of ice on the tomatoes. 'Er brother is a butcher."

"How—nice."

"And never no smell of cooking!" continued the old woman, with a curious expression of triumph. *"Never!"*

Pam pushed her damp hair wearily back from her face.

"Mrs. Kingdom can't be frying meat at this time of day," she remarked, "but it certainly smells like it."

"Every evening at six I 'ad to shut my windows,"—began Pilgrim, over again, and Pam lost patience.

"I wish you'd shut your——oh, Pilly; *don't* talk about it," she cried, nervously; "I can't bear it. I'm positively sick with the heat."

"Of course you are, you poor child,—but what do you think of me, fresh from them sea-breezes——"

Pam rose. "I'm going out," she declared, fastening her collar; "it can't be worse than this. I'll go to the Abbey and sit in the darkest corner I can find."

"You'll get a sunstroke." Pilgrim was appalled, and all unwitting of the fact that it was her own repetitive eloquence that was driving her mistress to take such a desperate step. But Pam held to her plan. She must go somewhere, she must be alone, and she had not been to the Abbey since May, just after her last visit to the Duchess.

So she went into her bedroom and put on a very ancient

but shady hat, and came back with a little cotton sunshade in her hand.

Pilgrim was fanning herself with a newspaper she had bought in the train, her mouth pursed in ostentatious disapproval, and a faint smile stirred the girl's lips as she stood pondering whether she should or should not force gloves on her limp fingers.

"Good-bye, Pilly."

"Good-bye, Miss Pam, I'm sure." Then the old woman raised her eyes from the flabby *Daily Mail.* "Oh, Pam, you *do* look so bad; are you sure you're not ill? I can see the bones right through your cheeks, and your eyes are as big as saucers."

"How dangerously attractive I must be! Of course I'm not ill, you old goose; it's only the heat,—the last fortnight has been—pretty bad."

"And me away enjoying the sea-br——"

"Jane Pilgrim, if you say the word 'breezes' again I'll kill you! Good-bye."

And the old woman, deeply offended, took up the paper and began to read. "If you 'adn't been so *foolish,*" she remarked, as Pam turned to the door, "you could have gone yourself. It would be just as well, Miss Pam," she continued, acidly respectful, "if you 'ad remembered that charity begins at 'ome."

"Oh, Pilly, *please* don't be nasty when I come in! I know it's only because I look pale, but—I'm perfectly well."

Pam stood in the doorway, her brows knit beseechingly.

Pilgrim was to her father, mother and friends all in one, but she grew cantankerous as she grew older, and Pam was very tired.

"Well,—I'm sure I don't mean to be cross. Only,—that woman would have got on all right,—they always do, and——"

"And the baby would have died. Really, Pilgrim, I am ashamed of you. That four pounds literally meant the poor little thing's life, and to me it would have meant only a few days—where it is cool. Now, good-bye, dear. It's after four, and must soon get better."

She turned and was closing the door when a sound, best described as a whoop, recalled her.

"Pilly!"

"Pam, listen. 'E's back in town, the little blind gentleman. 'Among others dining at the Savoy last night I saw Lady Ribbesford looking very handsome in white, the Maharajah of Jaipore, Sir William Tarpendale, and M. de Lensky of the Russian Embassy, whose engagement to a beautiful widow is said to be about to be announced,'—and 'e 'asn't been to see you!" groaned the old woman. "Just like 'em all."

Pam shrugged her shoulders. "The beautiful widow is probably Evelyn," she said; "the Duchess told me he was very devoted to her."

Pilgrim's eyes filled with tears. "Oh!" she said. "Even if engaged, 'e might 'ave *called!*"

Pam came back and kissed her. "Don't bother, Pilly, dear; he'll come some day, you'll see. You must remember

how busy young men are,—particularly young men on the verge of becoming engaged to beautiful widows!"

Then, at last, she got away, and went out into the stale heat. So Lensky was in town —doubtless on his way North. And he was going to marry his *plus pur type Anglais*.

She reached the Square, and stood leaning against the wall of a house, waiting for the 'bus.

He had not come to see her in May, and he would of course not come now. She had been so disappointed in May, for she had been sure that he would come, and she should have been so glad to see him! He was such a dear. He was so entirely pleasant to her, with his quiet voice, his steadfast eyes, his quaintly precise accent. Even his perfect clothes and the small seal ring on his little finger added to her complete satisfaction in him.

The men she saw every day were so different: Mr. Hodge and Mr. Tavistock, with their carefully creased trousers that bulged at the knees, their cheap ties, their too thick watch-chains.

Mr. Bingle, whose appearances were only semi-occasional, was, though loudly vulgar, infinitely better than his two juniors, with their awful gentility.

He at any rate was genuine, whereas they were painfully bad imitations of that thing, indefinable and unmistakable, of which Jack Lensky was the perfect flower.

If she had been living the life of other women of her breeding, surrounded by men of her own class, Lensky's clothes would have made little or no impression on her, but as things were, her mind turned, now that she believed him to

be lost to her, again and again to the memory of his perfect attire; even the fineness of his handkerchief and his silk socks, the delicate scent of Russian leather, Russian cigarettes, and some unknown toilet-water that hung about him. He was the one gentleman left to her, and now she had lost him. And no 'bus was in sight, and her very knees shook under her with heat-exhaustion.

Perhaps all the 'bus-horses had had sunstrokes!

He might have come once more. Miss Greene-with-an-E had already asked why he never came, and had shrugged her shoulders at Pam's truthful avowal of ignorance. He should have not escaped so easily from her, she was thinking, and at the moment the transparent reflection had amused Pam.

Even Mrs. Kingdom, the landlady, had asked Pam why the beautiful young gentleman no longer came. Poor Mrs. Kingdom, who was, in her inexpressive dourness, a mystery to Pam; for the woman was even yet handsome, her dreary face still retaining some faint spark of the charm that had years ago won for her one glimpse of the joys of life.

Kingdom, a fireman, and a devout worshipper of a devil he called God, had been her refuge when that joy had failed her, and as long as he lived she had taken her fading beauty regularly to the temple where his ominous deity was worshipped, and submitted her will unmurmuringly to his. But since he died, someone had told Pilgrim, she had sat in neither chapel nor church, and no one knew what thoughts crept through her stifled mind as she went about her work.

And even this poor creature had wondered why Lensky no longer came toiling up the long stairs!

Pam took off her gloves. She could not bear them. And the 'bus was coming.

She would go inside; it might be cooler; no, she would go outside, for there would be more air.

And then, suddenly, there he was, in a small brown victoria, poking his coachman in the back with his stick, jumping out almost before the big horse had stopped, holding her hand in his, while the sun on his glossy hair almost dazzled her eyes.

"I am so glad," he cried, "so glad. I was just coming to see you." Without in the least intending to do so, horrified by the sound of her own words, Pam answered, abruptly, "I don't believe it."

The next moment she was sitting beside him in the brown chariot, and he was saying to the coachman, "Go on, Sampson,—to the address I gave you——"

CHAPTER XIII

AS Miss Greene-with-an-E met them on the stairs, Pam felt her face burst into a glow of colour. The girl must have confessed, had she been asked during her dreary wait for the 'bus, that it would have pleased her vanity, quite apart from her pleasure in seeing Lensky, to have him call again at 43, but now that he had come her nerves seemed to have regained their balance, and she blushed for what she called her snobbery.

Miss Greene-with-an-E stopped her, on the pretence of enquiring for her health, and as Lensky waited, shot more than one glance at his gently blank face, and, when she had released Pam, crossed the passage and went into Miss Vesey's room to tell her the news. Pam blushed again, but Pilgrim's delight in Lensky's reappearance was so openly shown in her old face that both he and Pam laughed, and all embarrassment fled.

"How do you do, Pilgrim?" he said, kindly; "you look much better than when I last saw you."

"Yes, m'lord; yes, sir, thank you. Shall I boil the kettle, Miss Pam?"

Lensky took off his gloves and sat down, looking round the room with a well-pleased air. "Boil no kettles," he said, "for I have come to take Miss Yeoland and you out to dinner."

"To dinner!" Pam was so glad to see him that her

voice had a queer little thrill in it, and she felt as though her smile were widening to a boundless grin. "People don't dine at half-past four, do they?"

"No," he answered, seriously, rubbing his glass on his handkerchief; "but they drink tea—iced tea, with lemon in it,—and then they talk, and when eight o'clock has come they dine. Don't they?"

"They do, those who have the proper clothes,—which, alas, Pilgrim and I have not, Mr. de Lensky!"

His glass was back in its place, and his troubled frown at her words gave him an almost ludicrously piteous air.

"Oh, don't talk to me of clothes," he pleaded, clasping his hands; "I don't mean a restaurant; I knew you wouldn't do that; I just want you to come to my rooms in St. James Street for tea and dinner. I know Pilgrim would like to, wouldn't you, Pilgrim? It is cool there, and there are flowers——"

Even in her determination to refuse his invitation, Pam appreciated the delicacy of his trying to tempt poor Pilgrim with the coolness and the flowers, instead of dazzling her with the recitation of a menu.

"We really can't, Mr. Lensky," the girl said, firmly, but smiling in deprecation as she spoke. "It is very kind of you to think of it, but—we really can't go."

He bowed his head in polite acceptance of her fiat and she turned to ring the bell, when Pilgrim's face caught her eye. Quite noiselessly, standing by the door in the proper attitude for a well-trained servant, Pilgrim was crying.

Her mouth was drawn down at the corners, her big nose

wrinkled and red, and from her tightly-squeezed eyes trickled two small tears.

"Oh, Pilly!" Pam rushed at her, as the poor old woman tried to leave the room. "Don't! Don't cry! I can't bear it."

But Pilgrim pushed her way towards the door. She could not stop crying; the sudden joy and the bitter disappointment were too much for her, and Pam knew, what Lensky did not suspect, that the sorrow had an origin deeper than the obvious one.

"Oh, Pilly, do you care so much?"

Pam stood caressing the old servant, her eyes involuntarily seeking Lensky's in a mute prayer for counsel.

"I think, Pilgrim," he said, quietly, his face not betraying the slightest sign of even kindly amusement as he spoke, "that Miss Yeoland has changed her mind. And if you will put on your hat we might as well go, as my horse dislikes standing in the heat."

When Pilgrim, without a word, had left the room, Pam turned to him, holding out her hand. "You are a dear to do that," she said, impulsively; "she is old, and—there are other reasons why she is so unlike other servants. Some day I will tell you."

"Thanks." He said no more, but she realised that no matter whom he married, no matter what happened, he and she understood each other once and for all.

Pilgrim, grilling in her winter mantle which, being decorated with beads, she had put on to do honour to the occasion, sat proudly in the victoria, glancing with disdain at the

pedestrians they passed. And Pam, in a white blouse and a hat with a red rose on it, was happier than she had been for weeks. In spite of herself this man's homage gratified her, besides which she greatly liked him, and she was to pass the next four or five hours in his company.

Lensky's rooms, over the shop of a fashionable boot-maker in St. James Street, were extremely characteristic of him.

The sitting-room, with its brown-leather chairs,—models of form and comfort,—its dull green walls, its valuable and beautiful etchings and engravings; the large, orderly writing-table with its Empire fittings; the fineness of the embroidered napery on the ready tea-table; the gleaming old samovar; the low oak book-shelves laden with well-bound books, many of them, judging from the small coat-of-arms on their backs, brought from Poland; the Bechstein Grand in the corner; the exquisite low-toned rugs on the highly-polished floor; the Chippendale cabinet filled with old china; the flat bowls full of roses; the antlers over the mantel-piece, the trophies of other kinds of hunting,—all these things combined to make a shell every convolution of which was exquisitely fitted to its owner.

When he had seated Pam in a low chair by the fern-filled fireplace, and she had decided for hot tea, and Pilgrim had removed her mantle and discreetly disappeared behind a faintly-gilded old leather screen at the far end of the room, Lensky made tea—deftly, gracefully, clashing no cups, dropping no spoons, his slim hands doing their work better than do those of most women.

And when the samovar was singing its Russian folksong

he looked up and asked the girl, with the most radiant of smiles, to take off her hat. "Even here it is warm," he added. She did as he suggested. "Have you always roses here?"

"No. Only when I have ladies coming to see me. The last time it was the Duchess of Wight and your beautiful cousin."

"I hear you are going to marry my beautiful cousin."

He set down the tea-caddy. "Who told you that?"

"The British Press! Is it not true?"

For a moment he was silent, and then, again opening the tea-caddy, he answered, "No, it is not true."

"I am rather glad," commented Pam, absently, leaning back in her chair and enjoying the scent of some crimson roses near her.

"Why are you glad?"

"Because,—well,—Evy's not the wife for you." She seemed to know him so well that her remark appeared to her a quite natural one.

He laughed. "Look at the portrait behind you, Miss Yeoland." The portrait, a small one in pastel, represented a young woman in voluminous pink satin skirts. On her smooth yellow head rested, delicately, as if about to fly away, a wreath of pink roses, and under the roses smiled sweetly down at the English girl, Lensky's face.

"How much you look like her!"

"Yes; it is really rather absurd, isn't it? Alas, it is no longer so strong, the resemblance, for she is old, *ma mère,* and ill. I nearly lost her in May."

"Does she never come here?"

"Oh, no," he returned, pouring out the steaming tea, "it was Paris that she loved. I was born in Paris, and my sister, who is dead. London she says is foggy and cold."

"She couldn't call it cold to-day!"

"No, that she couldn't. But she has had much trouble; too much, even for a woman," he went on gravely, as he brought her tea to her, "and she no longer leaves home."

"She must miss you very much," remarked Pam, when Pilgrim had been given tea and cakes, which she insisted on consuming in the next room. It seemed to the girl that if this dear youth had been her son she could not have borne parting with him.

"She does. And she is like you; she thinks of a suitable wife for me. She wants me to marry and settle down in the old house."

"Well, why don't you?"

He set down his cup, and drew his chair near hers.

"It is what she asked me,—in May. And I told her I could not marry until I loved. And she said, *'Est-ce bien possible, mon petit, que tu n'aimes personne?' Et je lui répondis 'Oui, ma mère, c'est ça. C'est que je n'aime personne.'*"

Pam nibbled at a bit of almond. "It seems a great pity," she observed, "for it would be a comfort to her. Only how would you like living in the country?"

"I could never do that. The country bores me to death. After a month of it I can stand no more."

"Why didn't you come to see me when you came back in May?"

He rose and rang the bell. Then he opened the window and they stood looking out, while his servant cleared away the tea-things.

"I was in town only a fortnight, and I was very busy." Not a word of excuse, not even an expression of regret! She laughed. "I missed you," she said pathetically. "It was horrid of you."

"I am sorry,—but what does it matter now? Gregoire!" He turned and the servant came towards him.

"Miss Yeoland and her maid will dine with me, Gregoire. Do you like cold consommé, Miss Yeoland? And an aspic? Cold consommé, then, Gregoire—and game and salad, and ices. At eight."

"Bien, M'sieu'." The servant left the room and Lensky turned to Pam.

"I very often have little dinners brought in. Lady Hoagland and her youngest and prettiest girl came just before I left town in June. I like them so much."

"So the Duchess told me! But then, you like so many people, don't you?" Pam's eyes danced. "I am greatly grieved by the bad account the Duchess gave me of you!"

"Were you? Such as?"

His eyes, so innocent-looking, were fixed on hers in serene questioning.

"I really couldn't tell you."

"You mean—cards?"

"Yes. Are you really such a gambler?"

Still he did not smile. "Yes," he answered, gravely, "I am. Do you like music? I will play to you."

CHAPTER XIV

SHE did not see him again for months. The next day he left home, going to Scotland and later for a yachting-cruise with some people named Compton, of whom Pam had heard the Duchess speak. Pam missed him abjectly.

He did not write, consequently she knew nothing of his movements, and his silence awoke in her something very like resentment.

During September, which luckily was a rather cool month, she wrote a new novelette and tried her hand at some short stories, which she sent to the best magazines, the editors of which politely returned them.

Then she tried writing a serious novel, broke down in the middle because she could not think of anything to make her characters do, and burnt the manuscript.

She haunted the Abbey a good deal at this period, and used to walk in St. James Park, besides resuming her coaching-parties on the 'buses.

But in spite of these diversified amusements, time dragged and she found to her infinite disgust that Lensky had become a very disturbing element in her life.

She had made a mistake in going to see the Duchess, she had made an even greater one in admitting this wanderer from her former world to her intimacy, for philosopher as she believed herself, and as she indeed to a certain extent was, her own life, since her brief glimpse at the luxuries she could

no longer have, had grown to be harder to bear and to seem more sordid than ever.

It disgusted her to find herself longing for leather easy-chairs and mossy carpets, and she sincerely despised herself for feeling that a chop can be more than a chop if eaten on a porcelain plate, but nevertheless the longing and the feeling were indisputable, and not to be ignored.

And being as she was, more than half ill, and very nervous, there were times when her courage nearly gave way, and life seemed unfairly hard on her.

And Lensky did not write. He was of course amusing himself on his round of visits, eating all his chops off porcelain in every sense of the word, and of course he was busy. But she no longer suspected him of forgetting her. She knew he had not done that, and that he never would, but with a sort of self-pity quite new to her, she felt that he might have realised how lonely she was, and written to cheer her.

Often she recalled the afternoon and evening spent in his rooms, hours long in the pleasure they held, short in their passing! How they had enjoyed the delicious little dinner near the balcony-window, how pleasant had been to her unaccustomed fingers the very feeling of the linen and the silver. How like two children they had laughed and talked.

There was, in the girl's never-to-be-forgotten memories, that of another *tête-à-tête* meal,—a far-off supper in a far-off southern garden where nightingales sang and stone-pines stood black against a moonlit sea.

But it had been in Arcadia, that other meal, eaten, or rather neglected, when she was not yet twenty, and the man

opposite had been the wonderful faëry knight of the ineffaceable memory, whereas the dinner at Lensky's had taken place, for all its delights, in Everyday land, and Lensky himself no Arcadian Prince, but a charming friend and comrade.

The Arcadian supper had dimmed with time and looked to her memory's eye as if seen in a soap-bubble, iridescent and fleeting, but it was as undying as are certain pictures even when the beautiful blues and greens have faded; there was no magic about the St. James' Street dinner, but she clung to the reality and warmth of her new experience, and often recalled the incidents of the evening.

After dinner Lensky had again played to her.

He had the soul, if not the fingers, of an artist, and his piano sobbed and sang at his touch in a way that the girl, unmusical as she was, hardly appreciated.

Scraps of Chopin he played, and modern French songs—Fauré, Hahn, and César Franck; a stately old contre-danse of Lalli's, some ancient Spanish chorals, a Pastorale of Scarletti, bits of La Bohème and Aïda, longer passages of Grieg, Sinding, Beethoven, and Schumann,—all played with a kind of loving respect if without great technical skill. His fine profile clear-cut against a dark curtain, his head slightly thrown back, he sat like a young monk Pam had once seen in a picture, and the girl smiled as she recalled the Duchess's remark,—that he would gamble away the coat on his back if he had nothing else to stake.

"You like music?" he asked her once, without stopping playing.

"I like yours." And he had apparently understood. When her new novelette "Dorothy's Destiny" was paid for, Pam went to a print-shop in Holborn and rummaged about until she found the picture of the young monk at the organ. It was a cheap reproduction, and she bought it, to the great mystification of Pilgrim, whose admiration was concentrated on the scantily attired inspiring angels entwined among the organ pipes. This picture she had framed and hung on the wall in her sitting-room.

Sometimes Pilgrim, who had enquired as to the veracity of the report about Lensky's engagement, and whose delight on learning that it was false was amusingly apparent, would lead the conversation round by some cunning détour to the subject of Lensky, and Pam who knew that in her old nurse's mind she herself was already Madame de Lensky, living in that brown-leather paradise over the bootmaker's, played up to her with an innocent face.

"A lovely young gentleman," Pilgrim began once, "and 'as such beautiful manners. If I was a Spanish Hinfanta 'e couldn't have been more courcheous to me."

And even when nearly three months had passed without bringing any news from the courteous one, Pilgrim kept up her courage.

"Remember how it was before," she told herself, though she believed herself to be telling Pam. "Some day 'e'll just come in, as smooth as cream, and explain all about it."

Late in October Pam caught her heel in a hole in the stair-carpet, and twisting her ankle badly, was obliged to

submit to be carried upstairs by the gallant Mr. Tavistock, and for three weeks could not leave her room.

During her term of imprisonment, Pilgrim, forgetting her crotchets and the uncomfortable ways that had grown as she grew older, became again by a miracle of love the tender, patient nurse who had mothered the lonely child so many years, and to whom she had stuck, as the saying goes, through so little of thick, and so much of thin.

And Pam, consoled by this sudden change, her nerves no longer racked by the old woman's fretfulness and unreasonable ill temper, really enjoyed her little illness.

So when she could walk again, she found herself, to her surprise, better than she had been for months, as well as less nervous.

It had rained most of October, but November was, though dark, fairly dry.

One day, towards the middle of the month, Pam set out to pay a visit in Seven Dials. The woman to whom she had given the five pounds that cost her her holiday in the summer, had just presented her sovereign with another patriot and the glad news having been conveyed to Pam by a ricketty messenger of eight, the girl was obliged to go and see the newcomer, and to condole with the reluctant mother.

After a stifling quarter of an hour in the Coptic Street cellar, during which the baby had shrieked loudly and refused to be comforted, even by a bit of banana administered to it by a stolid elder sister, Pam went back Shaftesbury Avenue, past the Baptist Church, and along the High Street.

Within the brown railings of St. Giles' Church the grass

and the dishevelled shrubs were still green, and behind the church there was, she knew, an open space in which the air ought to be better than elsewhere in the neighbourhood, and a bench on which she might sit.

Limping rather badly by this time, for she was tired, she went up the steps into the churchyard and was about to go in when she heard someone call her name, and turning, found herself face to face with Lensky.

CHAPTER XV

"PILGRIM told me you had come in this direction," he explained, shaking hands with her, "but she didn't know where, and I have been on the point of giving you up and going back to Huntley Street to wait for you——"

"I *am* glad to see you," she returned, heartily. It was good to feel her hand in his again. "We were talking about you only to-day! Come on to the bench there,—I've got a lame ankle and must rest."

Their arrival disturbed a semi-intoxicated lady with modest violets on her bonnet, who had come into that quiet place for the purpose of a short nap.

"'Ow'd you like it if *you* 'adn't 'ad a cup of tea since yesterday morning?" enquired this lady, who was apparently possessed by a thirst for information as well as by that more material one.

Pam looked at her. "Do you know," she answered, "I was sure the minute I saw you that you hadn't had any tea since yesterday!"

"Was you now, Miss?"

"How is William?" pursued the girl.

"William? Whose William? Oh, *my* William! Well, thank you, Miss. Williamshwell."

Pam gave her sixpence, and then explained her undisciplinary act to Lensky by telling him that the poor creature had been sober and comparatively industrious until two years

ago, when her two children had been burned to death while she was out charing.

"William is—only her husband!"

Lensky laughed.

"Only her husband!"

"Well, I mean, he's an awful old creature who always *has* drunk, and the children were—her children. She'll buy gin with that sixpence, I suppose."

"And you don't care?"

"Not much," she returned, frankly, "if it makes her forget those poor little things being roasted alive. B'r—r—r!" She shuddered. "But don't let's talk about it. Tell me about your doings. Did you have a good time in Scotland?"

"Very excellent indeed."

"Where were you?"

"With the Hetleys, in Inverness, with the MacKenzies, and a lot of others. Scotland is a ripping place."

His scraps of slang, so accurately used, so exquisitely enunciated, always amused Pam. And he looked so fresh, so healthy, the slightest touch of sunburn on his delicate skin, that she felt an almost maternal thrill of satisfaction in the fact that his health was so good.

"And the yachting?"

"Ah, yes, the yachting! I am such a lazy little brute that of all things I love yachting. The *Mawvette* is a perfect little craft, shipshape and comfortable. Do you like being on the water?"

Pam laughed. "I do. And in the days of my youth I

could sail a boat and row, as well as a boy. We lived a great deal on the Riviera when I was a child."

"I know. Lady Chesney told me. She was at the Hetley's while I was there, and she talked about you."

"Then you must have made her," declared Pam, unceremoniously. "She hasn't seen me for ages, and I don't believe she thinks of me more than once in a year; I am sure I don't of her."

"She is very handsome," he explained, unruffled, "so I talk a great deal to her. But she does not know that I know you, and when she talks about you it is in connection with her own childhood."

Pam glanced at him. "Oh,—she talks to you about her own childhood, does she? She never had a real one, poor Evy; she was always grown-up inside, but I suppose she doesn't know that."

"You don't like her, then?"

She hesitated. "No, I don't, particularly," she answered truthfully, wondering if he would be mannish enough to think that her avowal betrayed a jealousy of her cousin's beauty.

Evidently, however, he understood.

"I daresay she bores you," he commented, poking the scant gravel with his stick. "She would bore me if she were not so beautiful."

"I wish you could have seen my mother, ten years ago. Only you would have fallen in love with her! That's one reason why I never particularly admired Evy, I suppose; because she is a sort of bad copy of Mother."

"So the Duchess told me. The Peeles were at the MacKenzies, by the way. They are going to make him Chancellor of the Duchy of—I forget what."

"No!"

"Yes. They were all talking about it."

Pam flushed. "I *am* glad," she cried, "Lady Henny will be delighted."

"I don't think she was, though. I suspect Lady Henrietta of great ambition for her husband," answered Lensky, thoughtfully, "and this will be being a minister without a department, and—with a very good income."

"A sinecure, then?"

Lensky laughed. "Heaven forbid. There *are* no sinecures in this free land. But,—I fancy she wants him to go down into the arena and fight, and the Chancellor of *Chose* will do no fighting. However, it's a very good position——"

She frowned, drawing her thick brows nearly together.

"Poor fellow," she said, softly, "he was born for big battles; I knew him years ago and I think he was the most ambitious man I ever saw in my life. Then,—his health gave way. It is a great pity."

There was a short silence, after which with a slight effort, she asked briskly, "And how is the fair Lady Alys?"

"Lovelier than ever, in spite of a sunburnt nose. Ah, people may say what they like, but there are no women in the world like Englishwomen! Other *countries* are nicer than your foggy island, but the people,—men and women,—are wonderful. Awf—fully jolly!"

"Bravo, Lamartine."

He looked puzzled. "Lamartine?"

"Yes. You look exactly like him,—in profile. I called you Lamartine until—I knew you!"

She rose as she finished speaking. "It is getting late; will you go back with me?"

He hesitated. "No,—I cannot do that,—I mean to say——" Slowly they walked towards the gate, and as they reached the big square tomb of Richard Pendrell, he stopped.

"Miss Yeoland," he said, gravely, "I love you. Will you marry me?"

For a moment, in her overwhelming amazement, she stared at him in stupid silence. He had taken off his hat and stood before her, bareheaded, something indescribably chivalrous in his attitude.

"You—you *can't* love me," she stammered.

"I do. At first," he went on deliberately, "I did not know what it was. And then, the evening you and Pilgrim dined with me, I understood."

"'The preserver of the Life of King Charles the Second'—horrid little wretch" she read on the tomb and reflected, before she could answer. Then she said slowly, "I am—sorry, so very sorry, but—I do not love you."

"I know that," he answered, "of course you do not; but you would later. I should be very good to you."

"No, no—I never could. And,—oh, I don't see how you can! I *am* so ugly!"

"I admire beauty, but I love you," he answered gravely. "Will you marry me?"

"Mr. de Lensky, I cannot. Please believe me at once. I am very fond of you, indeed I am, but I cannot marry you." Her voice in its painful sincerity was almost piteous.

"Do you love someone else?"

She looked into his face with wet eyes. "No. Not now. But I did once, and—I can never forget him. And I shall never marry."

After a long pause Lensky laid his hat and stick on the tomb of the King's preserver, and took her hands in his.

"If you love no one now," he asked evenly, "may I try again, later?"

"No, no. *Please!* I never could, never in the world. But, oh, please," she added gripping his hands hard, "please keep on being my friend."

He kissed her grimy gloves as though they had been those of his sovereign, and then gently dropped her hands.

"I am always your friend," he said, simply, "always; and I shall come to tea, if I may, on Monday."

The serene beauty of his face had never struck her so forcibly as it did at this moment, as, after a formal bow he hurried to his hansom and left her standing in the dusk, by the old tomb.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN she had reached No. 43 and toiled up the dark stairs, the door was opened by a little old man who, when he saw her, nearly burst into tears, and whom she promptly and warmly embraced.

"Cazzy! My dear old Cazzy! I never was so glad to see anyone in my life. What are you doing in this wicked metropolis, and how long are you going to stay? Tea, Pilly, much tea, and ortolans and pistachio-nuts,—let's be extravagant and send Mildred out for a shilling seed-cake!"

Pam flung her hat and jacket on to the sofa and still chattering with delight, attacked the fire, whose subdued glow was altogether unworthy of so great an occasion. The old man wiped his eyes as he watched her.

"My dear Miss Pam,—have you not been well? You look thinner than the last time I saw you,—and pale——"

She laughed. "Older, Cazzy, that's all! Age, and Pilly's ways of going on. I shall be twenty-eight two weeks from yesterday, and the bloom of youth has departed. Oh, it *is* nice to see you again!"

Old Cazalet, for many years her grandfather's steward, and now serving, in the same capacity, the present Earl, sat by the fire, nursing a gouty foot and watching the girl's every movement with the pathetic delight of the old in the young.

"How's Mrs. Hamp? And Mary Rud? And have any

more horrible improvements been made to the old house? And was the ruin kept in order, and Grandfather's tablet bright?"

The old man blew his nose again and again in the emotions engendered by her faithful memories.

At last Mildred brought the cake, and tea was made, and Pam had stopped bombarding him with questions.

"Oh, Miss Pam, how well I remember the day you came to Monks' Yeoland! His Lordship was in his wheel-chair on the terrace, and I pointed him out to you and then stood and watched you go up to him, your monkey in your little arms! And he loved you at first sight, just as I—just as I had known he would."

She nodded. "Yes. We understood each other at once. And understanding is so much rarer than loving, Cazzy. And to think that if you had not come to the Villa to look up Mother, that time, I should never have known my G.F.!"

The old man beamed. "Yes; I have always been glad of that. Ah, the Villa! Mr. and Mrs. Sacheverel so happy, —and oh, how beautiful she was! Do you remember the picnic? And Madame Ravoglia?"

"*Don't* I remember, poor old Cazzy, and how I scandalised you by reciting some poetry,—and then you made up your dear old mind to tell my grandfather about me, and—to persuade him to send for me—— How are the Cunninghams, Cazzy?"

"The Rector died last July, and Mrs. Cunningham, poor lady, went away, I don't know where. The new Rector is quite young, and is named Blood. Such an unpleasant

name, I always think. Have you news of Lady Chesney, and of Mr. Ratty?"

"Lady Chesney is much admired, I hear,—and very well. Ratty is also very well, though I doubt," she added, laughing, "if he is much admired. What a *pudding* of a boy he was, wasn't he?"

But Cazalet was not listening. He sat staring into the fire, an excited smile on his big mouth.

"What's the matter, Cazzy? You have something on your mind!"

He gave a little jump. "No, no. Nothing at all. What should I have on my mind?"

Pilly had gone out with the tea-tray, so they were alone, and Pam, after a solemn stare at him, burst out, "Cazzy, I believe you've come up to town *to be married!* You show every sign of a young man about to commit matrimony!"

"Me! Oh, my dear young lady," he protested, flushing vividly, and then when she burst out laughing he joined her, rubbing his wrinkled old hands together in delight. After a while, when they had discussed Pam's latest story, (the old man read them all, and was vastly proud of her literary genius), he asked her suddenly, "Miss Pam,—have you plenty of money?"

"Why, Cazzy, what a silly question! As if anyone ever had plenty of money. Of course I haven't."

"No, but—I mean," he pursued with a lack of tact unusual to him, "have you quite enough for the coming winter? Enough to buy yourself new clothes? Hats with feathers, and velvet cloaks——"

"Cazzy!" She stared at him for a moment, seriously wondering if he were going out of his mind. "'*Hats with feathers, and velvet cloaks.*'"

The old man rose excitedly, wringing his hands together. "Yes, and gold shoes, and silk petticoats, and white gloves, and scents," he continued. "Oh, Pam, *have* you enough for these things?"

Pam put her hand on his shoulder. "You are positively lyrical, dear old man," she said gently, "but you must not get so excited. No,—I *certainly* have not money enough to buy gold shoes, whatever they may be, but I have a roof over my head, and enough to eat, and—I am contented. But what *is* the matter?" she cried, now really alarmed. For from his coat-tail pocket he had produced a pair of diminutive gilt-leather slippers with preposterously high heels, and pressed them into her hands.

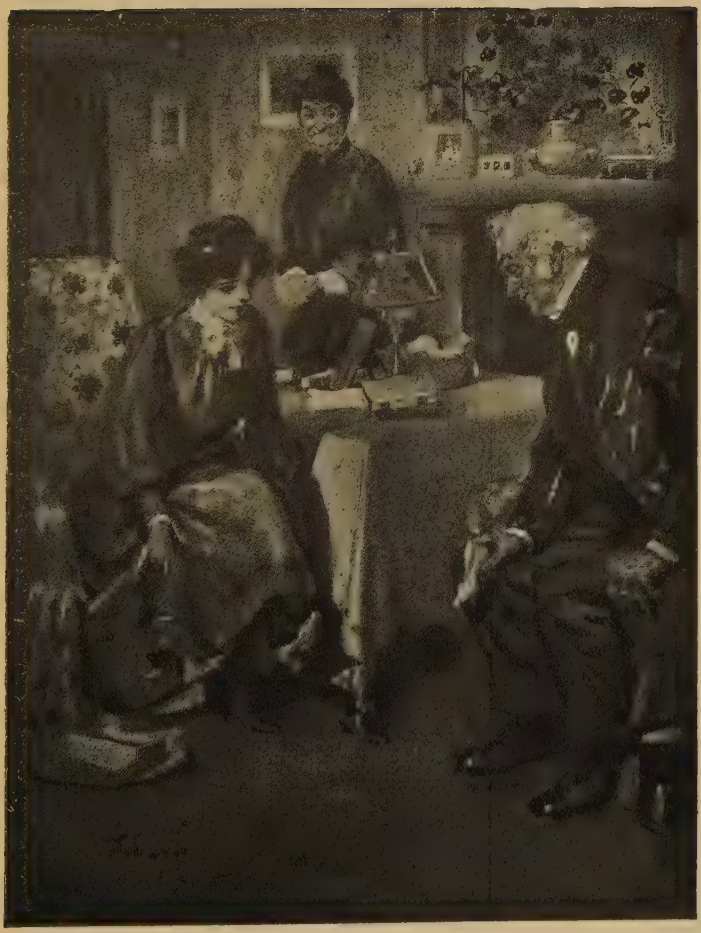
"Put them on," he gasped, "I bought them on my way. Put them on."

Sitting down she took off her right shoe, and squeezing her toes into the slipper, held up her foot. "They are much too small, you see," she said, soothingly, "but I shall always keep them——"

Tears streaming down his face he was clawing and tearing at his tightly-buttoned old best black coat.

"It's there, it's all there," he sobbed, handing her a large sealed letter, "the hats and the petticoats and the scents——" She took the letter.

"Will you please explain to me very quietly what is wrong?" She asked, her voice cold.



"'THEY ARE MUCH TOO SMALL, YOU SEE,' SHE SAID, SOOTHINGLY"

Dashing his shaking hand across his eyes he answered. "I beg your pardon. It is this: Mr. Burke has died, leaving you four hundred pounds a year and a house in Westminster."

For a moment the girl sat staring silently at the absurd little shoe dangling on her toes. "Charnley Burke—dead——"

"Yes. The letter is from his lawyers, and encloses one from himself to you. Four hundred pounds a year."

After a long pause, during which the old man rent the silence by a long blast on his nose, she opened the letter that confirmed the ridiculous fairy-story she was asked to believe.

"It is true, Cazzy," she said at length.

"Yes. I am sorry I behaved so foolishly, but—I was so very glad."

She did not answer. She was opening the enclosed letter, addressed to her in the big, bold, rather clerkly hand she remembered.

"Melbourne, August 1," said the letter, "My dear Pam, —I have got Bright's disease and am going to die, so you won't look on this one letter in the light of a broken promise. Many men would have tried again, in my place, but I knew that your no meant no, and so I never bothered you.

"By the time this letter reaches you I shall be dead, and I am leaving you my house in Westminster, just behind the Abbey, and enough money to run it comfortably. I hope you will live in the house sometimes, at least. When you do, look at the portrait in the panelling over the fire-place

in the oak hall, and you'll see why I bought it of young Wantage, one night after dining there, a year or so after I last saw you.

"I saw your father and mother in Japan, and they are as happy as ever. Ah, my dear, if you could have loved me (as I could have loved you) in the way they love each other! I have knocked about a good bit since I saw you, and have had some pretty good times, but I never forgot you (women never realise how utterly apart a man's 'good times' are from his love!) and I can still see your dear, plain little face. For I *never* thought you pretty, you know. Do you remember chasing Caliban round the garden in Aix until he got palpitations of the heart?

"It's wonderful how clearly I remember every little incident connected with you, and every word you ever said to me. Well, good-bye, Pam. I loved you then, and I love you still, somehow. I beg your pardon for being so rude to you that time in Peele's house, but I was jealous of him. Think of me sometimes, if you don't mind. God bless you.

"CHARNLEY BURKE."

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

"OH, Pilly, I have passed it dozens of times on my way to and from the Cloisters! In the summer poor children dance to the hurdy-gurdies in front of it,—I've seen them!"

"And a nice row they make, too, I'll be bound," returned Pilgrim, sourly.

Pam did not hear, for she was standing in a quiet back-water of Westminster, just without the reach of the ceaseless ebb and flow of traffic, gazing up at her house. Oh, the wonder of it, the rapture, that she the houseless should have a house, that she the derelict should have been towed to honourable harbour.

The dingy old yellow-brick edifice, stained and blackened with two hundred years of London smoke, could not have looked more beautiful to her had it been built of gold.

A vagrant leading a dog drifted into sight from the direction of Great Peter Street, and seeing the lady standing in the little cul-de-sac gazing dreamily at the house that blocked it, decided to try for a penny and was given a shilling. Pam's thin face glowed with colour and happiness; she would have given the poor houseless brother half-a-crown but that she was afraid of Pilgrim.

"Thank yer, lidy,—thank yer. I don't drink, neither."

"Don't you," asked Pam, absently, "why not?" Then

seeing his reproving stare she burst out laughing and went on to the broad green door under the once-white portico.

As she touched the bell a voice rang out in the pale sunshine, a voice so great, soft, and musical that the girl paused, holding up her hand to Pilgrim, who was about to speak.

"Hush! 'Oh, Lord, our God, Be thou our Guide'—Pilly, it is Big Ben ringing us in!"

"I can't abide bells myself," returned Pilgrim, "they give me the 'eadache——"

The door opened, and a shuffling old woman appeared in the dusk of the interior.

"You are Mrs. Pounder? I am Miss Yeoland, come to see—the house."

Mrs. Pounder smiled, a probably forced smile, for hers had been a sinecure, and its days were no doubt numbered.

"Good-morning, Miss, I'm sure. I thought you'd be coming by the Chimes Lane door; Mr. Wantage allus did, and Mr. Burke too."

Pam whose heart was beating in the most disconcerting way, stood peering about the dark-panelled hall in which she found herself. "But surely this is the front-door?"

Mrs. Pounder turned on a blaze of electric-light. "We 'as *three* front-doors, Miss," she returned with not unnatural pride, and a smile that was pleasant but dark-grey, owing to defective teeth; "it used to be three 'ouses, they say. This is the oak-'all, Miss."

Pam did not speak. She was looking up at the picture that Burke had mentioned in his letter, and there was a queer feeling in her throat.

A dark-faced girl, she was, this girl smiling down at her from her place in the panelling over the high chimney-piece. She wore a red kerchief over her rough black hair, and a black bodice with white kerchief and sleeves, as if in some delicate travesty of gypsydom. Pam saw the resemblance to herself at once, though the other girl, the long-dead unknown girl, was far prettier than she. There were the same shadowy eyes, the same long, flexible red mouth, the same carriage of the head. And he had bought the house for the sake of the picture!

Her pity for him welled up into her eyes. He had been so big, so burly, so strong, so nearly fat; his face had been so red, his hands so broad; his voice, with its frank Colonial accent, so loud. He had loved her, but she had never pitied him much, and when he had gone out of her life she had never given him another thought; yet he had remembered her like this.

"There ain't been a moth in the house the 'ole time I've been in it," remarked Mrs. Pounder at this point in the girl's reflections. "It's hair I believe in; nothing is so good as hair."

"Hair?" Pam stared at her. "What kind of hair?"

"Fresh hair, Miss. Every week I've 'ad the windows open, year in and year out——"

"Oh," said Pam.

The hall was like the inside of an old oak chest, dark and plain; on the walls hung some portraits, and a huge Cordovan leather screen hid the entrance-door. There was a low divan by this screen, and—leather chairs!

"Pilly," cried Pam, "are you happy?"

"Very happy, Miss Pam," returned Pilgrim, looking supremely miserable and aspirating the "h" malignantly.

Mrs. Pounder stood with her hands on her figure, watching her new owner with a relieved eye. "Would you like to see the dining-room, Miss?"

The dining-room lay opposite the door by which Pam had entered her kingdom, and from it, turning at right angles to the left, a narrow passage led to where, at its rectangular junction with a wider one, another house-door led into the street behind Little Cowley Street.

"This is the Chimes Lane door, Miss,—the one we usurly,—I mean the one the gentlemen usurly used," explained Mrs. Pounder, unbarring and opening the door in question.

Pam looked out into the narrow street on the opposite side of which ran a high black wall.

"Chimes Lane,—what a pretty name!"

"Yes, but it's narrow. Now you see, Miss, this 'ere passage goes back in a line with the dining-room, and then you go up the steps to the left back into the 'all. Just a square circle as you might say. Them embroideries, and the Japanese pictures belonged to Mr. Wantage's grandmother. Poor lady, it's a good thing she didn't know of the goings-on that was agoin' to go on 'ere after 'er death!"

Pam stood in the narrow black stair-case looking up into the hall. "What kind of goings on?"

"Oh, Miss! 'E was very wild, poor Mr. Cyril; very wild indeed."

Pam tried to look sufficiently shocked to satisfy the good woman's expectations. "How very sad! And so he had to sell his house?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Now we'll go upstairs."

Oh, the joy of going up the narrow stair-case of one's own house! The joy of exploring one's own drawing-room, with its white walls up which flaunted, in broad stripes, preening peacocks; its glass cupboards filled with long-hoarded treasures of old china; its delicately brocaded, spindle-legged chairs; its pictures of powdered beaux and beauties, in dulled gold frames. That all these most beautiful and lovable things were hers Pam could not, and did not, thoroughly realise, until she saw Pilgrim pinching and scratching the yellow satin curtains with an unmistakable air of proprietorship.

"But how could Mr. Wantage sell the house just as it stood," the girl asked, suddenly, as Pilgrim, satisfied with the result of her investigations, dropped the curtain and turned to her. "Was he the last of the family?"

"Well, you see, Miss, it was like this. They wasn't a *great* family, not to say great. They was in the law, and there wasn't no entail. And Mr. Cyril, 'e was the last male. There was plenty of females,—they allers is,—but the things was 'is, left 'im by 'is grandfather, 'is father dying young. So when 'e, Mr. Cyril, wanted to sell, 'e just sold, and nobody couldn't say a word. 'E was very wild——"

"Is he—still alive?"

"Oh, dear no, Miss. We all think 'e's dead. Miss 'Onoria used to have letters, but 'e stopped writing long

ago. I do 'ope," the old woman added, "that 'e wasn't scalped."

"Scalped? Why should he have been?"

"Well, Miss, I don't know, I'm sure. But 'e was in the west of America—in Chicago—and sometimes of an evening I get quite low thinkin' 'e might 'ave been scalped."

"It's getting on, Miss Pam," interrupted Pilgrim, who had opened the door corresponding to the one leading to the dining-room one on the floor below, "shall we go on?"

The door led to a little passage, and the passage into a small white-panelled room as much like a box as was the hall, only this was a white box. The mantel-piece was of delicately carved white marble mellowed to cream-colour with age. To the right and left of the fireplace deep-carved cupboards, laden with rich-hued Crown Worcester china, sunk into the wall, and over the low divan covered with a piece of crimson Indian silk, hung quaint old prints representing hunting-scenes. Pam sat down on the divan and drew a deep breath. It was the most delightful room she had ever been in, and even in its desolation of empty years there hung over it an atmosphere, an aroma, that she could not express even mentally.

It was as if the gentle ghosts of long-since-dead inhabitants of the little room still hovered about it, and blessed their blissful successor.

"Pilly," she said, "this shall be my own room; my study where I shall never study, my boudoir where I shall never sulk, my 'morning-room' where I shall spend my evenings."

CHAPTER II

A WEEK later Pam and Pilgrim, together with a cook and a housemaid, were installed in the old house in Westminster as comfortably as if they had all grown up together in it.

Mrs. Pounder, depressed but sympathetic, had shuffled away to her native place by the sea, where she was taking a small house in which Pam had promised to sojourn for a few weeks in the summer.

It seemed to Pam very brutal to turn the old woman out of the house in which she had lived so long, but on investigation it transpired that Mrs. Pounder's pay as caretaker had been so good, and her manner of living so simple, that she found herself at this crisis very fairly well-to-do, and delighted at the prospect of returning to Bumblemouth, a village that appeared from her lively descriptions to the sympathetic Pam, to be a very Paradise on earth.

So on Monday morning Mrs. Pounder departed and Pilgrim greedily picked up the reins of government.

The house was so congenial to Pam that in coming to it she almost seemed to be returning home after a long absence.

For days she did not go out, except once when the delighted Duchess insisted on taking her to a shop and buying some clothes for her, and spent her whole time in exploring

every inch of her new kingdom, turning out drawers and chests, burrowing in old trunks in the garret, even examining the dark, vaulted cellar, in which to her joy she found some lonely old bottles of wine that had been forgotten Heaven only knows how long.

And one rainy morning she found, stuffed into a hideous old Chinese vase, made awful by great dragons galumphing over it, a tight roll of Malines lace.

And oh, the joy of washing with one's own hands the treasures one had found; of polishing bits of dilapidated silver; of joining with almost sacrilegiously modern Seccotine the long-divided body and handle of a Dutch jug; or with one's own slow and clumsy needle mending the rents in a lovely piece of ancient church embroidery!

Covered with dust, excited and warm, Pam passed her days in these blissful occupations, and one morning as she was sitting perched on a ladder tenderly dusting the picture over the mantel-piece in the Oak-Hall, Pilgrim appeared from the short stairs leading to the Chimes Lane door, and announced in a proud voice, "Lady Chesney."

Pam turned and waited for her cousin to sweep into daylight. "Hullo, Evelyn!" she said.

Lady Chesney, a large, beautiful person, the apotheosis of a poetically typical milkmaid, stood, all white and gold and blue, staring up into the room through a long gold lorgnon.

"Where are you?" she asked. "Oh,—how like you to receive guests on a ladder!"

Pam came down, laughing. "I didn't receive you, my

good girl; you just came! I'm glad to see you, Evy, and if I weren't covered with dust I'd kiss you. Sit down."

Evelyn did so, but continued to look round the room with civil curiosity. "I say, Pam, it's a quaint old place, isn't it? Poor old Burke, how nice of him to give it to you, wasn't it? I suppose he was in love with you, wasn't he?"

"It is, and it was, and it's none of your business,—to answer all your questions in orderly sequence. How splendid you are, Evelyn. I never thought you'd be so good-looking."

Lady Chesney blushed with pleasure,—and her blush was one of her best assets. She was an amiable, stupid young woman, who after a suppressed existence with a narrow and tyrannical husband, had been more surprised than anyone when her two years of mourning being over, she emerged into the glory and éclat of beautydom.

"You look very nice, too," she returned, a little timidly, for having always got on Pam's nerves, she was a trifle afraid of her outspoken cousin.

"I always *was* beautiful, though," Pam said solemnly, "so it's no surprise."

Evelyn smiled politely.

There was a short pause, during which Pam asked herself what there was lacking in her, that admiring beauty as she did, the radiant Evelyn already bored her, whereas Lensky was known to be devoted to the blooming young widow although he had frankly declared her to be stupid.

"You never answered my letter," Lady Chesney began presently.

"No,—I didn't have time. Who told you about—this?"

"De Rattrec. I believe old Cazalet told him. Pam, you don't look well. Have you been ill?"

"No; I'm all right."

"And you *must* get some decent clothes. That skirt is—absurd."

Evelyn's voice grew firmer, for she was sure of her ground here, and enjoyed the sensation.

"Nice skirt," returned Pam, carelessly, "and very dear. Cost twelve shillings!" Pam thoroughly understood, and enjoyed, Evelyn's standpoint, and the inferior position she herself occupied as an elderly, unbeautiful maiden, in her cousin's eyes.

Lady Chesney raised her eyebrows, a new trick that she had picked up from one of her friends. "Twelve shillings! My *dear* Pam. Well,—will you dine and go and hear La Bohème with me to-morrow?"

Pam rubbed her nose thoughtfully, leaving a black mark on that undistinguished feature. "*H'm!* have me some time when no opera's on, instead."

"Why?"

"Well,—I don't like music, you know, and then,—I am a dreadfully unsociable bird, and the thought of meeting people terrifies my timid soul——"

"Nonsense, your soul isn't a bit timid!"

"It is. It's like an oyster, shy and retiring in its shell,—to say nothing of the pearl in it. Who are dining with you?"

Evelyn blushed again, her peach-like face turned away.

"Well,—Ratty,—I mean de Rattrec, and Dolly Hetley,

and Tony Hetley and—a man you don't know; a man named de Lensky. All—very nice people whom you ought to know."

Now during Pam's long years of social annihilation, Evelyn, though on the rare occasions of their meeting she had been kind and cordial to her cousin, and offered her *tête-à-tête* meals and even money, there had been from her no remarks about people whom Pam ought to know. And Pam, of course, remembered this, but quite without resentment. Sir George Chesney had never approved of her, but he would have helped her to live if she had been willing to take help from him, and Evelyn had more than once urgently pressed her cousin to take if not his, then at least some of her own money. So Pam realised that they had both treated her, as the world goes, uncommonly well, and understood most clearly that Evelyn's present attitude was natural and not at all to be objected to.

But whereas the old Duchess would any day have picked Pam, dusty or muddy, up in her carriage no matter who might at the moment be sharing it with her, and borne the girl home in triumph, Evelyn would, if chance had brought them together in the presence of other people, have been ashamed of her cousin, and, if possible, would have avoided speaking to her.

And because of the characteristic differences that lay at the root of these two potential lines of action, rather than the potential lines of action themselves, Pam loved the Duchess and looked on Evelyn with a sort of benevolent indifference.

"Will you come?" urged Lady Chesney, a little anxiously, "I have been thinking about it all,—about how we shall have to manage——"

"Manage what?"

"I mean socially. You see you disappeared so completely, I daresay most people think you are dead——"

"Most people don't know I ever lived. I was always beautifully obscure——"

"You know what I mean. And now you have this really very nice little house you'll of course have to——"

"To resurrect?" Pam frowned, and rising began to prowl about the room, her hands behind her back, her head bent. Until now all these things had not occurred to her. Subconsciously, as she washed her china treasures and mended her old pieces of embroidery, she had pictured the future as very much resembling the past, but for the blazoned facts of the house and what seemed to her plenty of money.

She saw herself and Pilly living on alone, going to an occasional play, enjoying a holiday every summer. She would as usual take long tramps, spend mornings in picture-galleries, and amuse herself in helping substantially those of her friends to whom hitherto she had been able to give only immaterial aid.

And now it appeared that hordes of people were going to descend on her, wrecking her solitude, disturbing her habits, jarring against the shyness that half unknown to herself had grown up like a delicate shell between her and the rest of the world.

"I am very poor, really, for the likes of you," she pleaded feebly. "I can't give dinners and things——"

Evelyn nodded with solemn importance. "Of course you can't,—he might just as well have made it five hundred —but—you can enjoy life again, and you see I can chaperon you."

Pam's frown disappeared and she turned to her cousin with a laugh. "Ha-ha! I see now, you artful thing! You want me to chaperon you. I understand that every smart young matron needs a respectable-looking girl to take about with her, nowadays! And you think I would answer the purpose for you! Well, I won't. I won't be gooseberry, and I won't go to three-cornered dinners and luncheons. I am old and crusty and intend to spend my declining years *au coin du feu* with a book!"

"How horrid of you, Pam. You are just the same nasty tease you used to be. And you are unjust. I thought you'd be *glad* to have a good time again, and I wanted to help you." Evelyn's blue eyes were wet with vexation, and Pam relented. "All right, Evy, I'll come to-morrow. What time?"

"Seven. And—don't mention that you've been in town always, will you?"

"Not unless I'm asked. I'll come late, and you tell 'em all first that I'm just out of a private lunatic asylum,—so they'll avoid the delicate subject of my past. How's Ratty?"

"He's very well. I call him de Rattrec now. Then you won't tell about—that place?"

"Bloomsbury is certainly infinitely more respectable than Great Peter Street!"

"Oh dear," wailed Lady Chesney forlornly, "Ratty *said* you'd behave like that!"

"Did he tell you of our last cosy chat together?"

"Yes, he did, and I must say I think you behaved abominably. However, he won't bother you any more. He is *really* in love now,—such a sweet girl, Dolly Hetley, a great friend of mine."

"Oh, really? I *am* glad, Evy. Give him my love, will you?"

When Lady Chesney had gone, Pam went upstairs and sought out Pilgrim.

"Pilly," she said, "prepare purple and fine linen for me, and myrtle to bind my brows,—I am dining out tomorrow!"

"Well! I *am* glad, Pam. The new black dress will be just the thing."

"No,—I must be very fine. Mr. de Lensky is to be there and I want to dazzle him. I shall wear the pink one the Duchess chose for me!"

CHAPTER III

LADY CHESNEY'S was one of those downy, silky, dusky, drawing-rooms that have of late years become so common in London.

One's feet sank into the rugs, one's body into the chairs, one's eyes were met on all sides with pictures of languorous drowsy women and children.

By day, filmy lace curtains behind the silk ones kept out the light, and at night the room was rosily crepuscular under the subdued glow of the dull electric bulbs.

Evelyn's favourite flower, tall white lilies, grew in brass pots and spread on the air a thick scent that, mingled with the more pungent odour of some oriental powder that she strewed on her wood-fire, had a curiously enervating effect on one's brain and disposed one to great physical lethargy as well. When Pam, outwardly calm but inwardly quivering with excitement, entered this room on Wednesday evening, she found that she was indeed, as she had jokingly threatened to be, the last of the guests to arrive.

Evelyn stood by the fire, a little silver shovel in her hand, digging from an inlaid box held to her by a tall man with a very bald head, some brownish powder.

"Oh, Pam,"—she cried, coming forward, handing the shovel to the man, "I was afraid you had understood half-past seven——" Kissing her cousin, Lady Chesney introduced her to a dark woman dressed in flame-colour, who was

sitting on the sofa with Lensky, adding as she emptied her shovel into the fire, producing thereby a loud spluttering and smoke, and an almost overpoweringly strong scent, something like that of incense,—" and Mr. de Lensky and Mr. Hetley——"

The two men bowed, and rising from a corner where he was sitting with a girl with a green and gold wreath in her hair, Ratty came lumbering not without dignity towards the newcomer.

" How d'you, Ratty? "

" H' are you, Pam."

It was all like a dream to the girl; the informal going in to dinner, the beautiful table, the flowers, the shaded lights. It was so long since she had taken such things as a pleasant matter of course.

She sat, as there was one man too few, between Evelyn and Bob Hetley, the bald-headed man, whose chief characteristic appeared to be an appalling stammer over which everyone made merry, and opposite Lensky, whom she had not seen since she left Huntley Street.

It was nine years since she had had on a low frock, and she felt not embarrassed, but a little cold. It seemed to her, too, that while Evelyn's milky shoulders were a joy to behold, and Lady Alys Compton's jewels covered a multitude of sins, the displayal of her own brownish bony structure could add but little to the joy of the occasion.

For a long time she sat in silence listening to the chatter of the others, and studying her neighbours.

Ratty's devotion to little Miss Hetley was unmistakable,

but it amused Pam to see that the fat youth was not above displaying it a trifle ostentatiously for her benefit, and that he cast an occasional glance at her, in search of the pique believed by the stronger sex to be felt by every woman in the circumstances.

Miss Hetley was pink and soft, with a shrewd grey eye, that looked with evident favour on her large admirer.

Lady Alys, the woman in the vermilion gauze frock, nervous, dark, fine-featured, something like an East Indian in type, watched Lensky furtively, but he had eyes for no one but Evelyn, who looked like a big Mermet rose-bud in her white frock.

Pam felt very old, as she watched her cousin and the little Hetley girl. Evelyn looked not a day more than five-and-twenty, though she was in reality Pam's senior by about two years, and Dolly Hetley, if she lived to be a hundred, would never grow to be other than a wrinkled old child, whereas she, Pam, knew herself to bear ineffaceable signs of her years of poverty and inferior food.

She had, too, forgotten the very language of these people. They named names she had never heard, used slang phrases she did not understand.

The dinner was excellent, and Pam being hungry and still unused to table-luxuries, ate hers with great enjoyment, her curious agitation gradually dying away and leaving her inwardly as tranquil as she had looked from the beginning.

"Have you heard La Bohème this year?" asked Lensky suddenly, for the first time speaking to her.

"I have never heard it."

"My cousin is not a bit musical," laughed Evelyn. "As a child she used to say it made her want to howl, like a dog."

"Your rag-time p-p-p-performances would about p-p-please her, then, Lensky," suggested Mr. Hetley explosively.

"What is rag-time?"

Hetley set down his glass—"Syn-syn-syn——" he began, and Ratty burst into a great unlovely guffaw.

"We'll forgive you your sins, Tony," he cried, delighted with his joke, "if you promise never to do it again!"

"-copated dance-music, M-Miss Yeoland," pursued Hetley tranquilly, "is called rag-time. And Mr. de Lensky is great at it, aren't you, Jack?"

Lensky smiled without speaking, but Pam knew that he did not give of his best music to everyone, as he had to her.

Then he turned again to Evelyn, and a devotional smile just stirring his beautiful mouth, leaned towards her,—so much nearer than any other man in the world could have leaned without being obnoxious,—and resumed his interrupted conversation with her.

When dinner was over and the men had come into the drawing-room there was a hurried donning of wraps and dividing up for the drive to the opera.

"I'll take Dolly and Mr. de Lensky," said Evelyn to Lady Alys, "and will you take Tony and Pam? My brother is going in a hansom."

But Lady Alys returned between two puffs of her cigarette, "Thank you, my dear. I've had as much as I can stand of Tony for one evening. You may have him, and Jack will come with me. I have a very important secret to tell him, too."

Evelyn flushed and bit her lip. "Very well,—just as you like. Will you go, then, Pam, and Mr. de Lensky, with Lady Alys?"

Lensky who had stood smoking and apparently hearing nothing of the discussion, threw away his cigarette and put the two women into the roomy electric brougham, jumping in after them. Pam was much amused.

As the carriage flew through the shafts of light that lie like isolated patches of sunshine on the dark London streets, she could see Lensky's face as he peered into Lady Alys' and his expression was every bit as passionately admiring as it had been half-an-hour before, when he gazed at Evelyn.

"Do you speak German, Miss Yeoland?" asked Lady Alys suddenly.

"No."

"Then,—you won't mind my telling Mr. de Lensky something in that hideous tongue,—not my secret, but about a third person——" But Pam knew what "warum" meant, and it was the burden of the song. Why, and why, and again why?

And that Lensky was annoyed she could see by his slight frown, and the shortness of his answers.

When they reached Covent Garden and they were going

up stairs, Lady Alys stopped to pick up her skirts and Lensky and Pam were for a moment out of earshot.

"I have so wanted to see you," he said hurriedly, "may I come to-morrow?"

She turned and smiled at him. "Yes, do," she answered, "I want to show you my house."

CHAPTER IV

DURING the performance of the beautiful little opera Pam sat quietly in her place and laid plans for the future. The music was to her merely a not unpleasant humming accompaniment to her very important reflections, and Mimi, Rodolfo and the rest of the actors disturbed her hardly at all.

It was pleasant in the box, pleasant to watch Evelyn as she listened in dreamy delight to the familiar music; pleasant even to study the other woman's dark face as she sulked with the serenely oblivious Lensky, pleasant to observe the progress of Ratty's so convenient and well-timed love-making, but it was still better to decide that she herself would, in the future, frequent but rarely her cousin's over-scented house, that being so used to solitude she needed it, and would continue to enjoy it.

"I shall be eccentric," she told herself, watching placidly while Rodolfo recounted to Marcello the heart-breaking tale of Mimi's illness, what time that unfortunate *môme* listens from behind a snow-laden tree,—"and then I can enjoy life. I couldn't stand much of this kind of thing. I wonder what these two poor dears would say if they knew that the object of their rivalry wants to marry *me! Wanted* to, rather, though. He doesn't look particularly ravaged, I must say! Perhaps he's glad now he sees how ugly I look in evening-dress! Although it could hardly have been my beauty that beguiled him in the first place.

"Well,—*va pour la vie de foyer!* I'm glad I have made up my mind. It's been like a jelly-fish ever since I began to think about all this. The Duchess will let me go to her when I get lonely and want to be with people, and Evy, who really isn't so bad, will ask me to dine occasionally, but Pilly and I will stick to each other and I'll eat most of my dinners at home. By the way, I'm going to get some oysters—*lots* of oysters,—and eat till I drop——"

At this point the curtain went down on the beautiful duet between the reconciled lovers, and the house burst into applause: Lensky did not move. Lady Alys spoke to him and he did not hear. Evelyn turned towards him and he did not see. His eyes were full of tears.

Pam watched him with a motherly longing to hide his emotion from these people who would not understand it, but Lady Alys burst out laughing. "Look at our Jacky boy! Wazzums tender heart broken over the woes of a wretched little *cocotte!*"

He wiped his eyes and put in his glass. "Oh, you poor English who never feel music. You think you hear it with your ears, but you don't," he answered, his slight accent stronger than Pam had ever heard it, "you don't know what loving it means."

For a moment the cosmopolitan in him was gone; he was the son of a susceptible Slavic race, frank in his emotionality, facing a handful of phlegmatic islanders, scorning them for their limitations.

Lady Alys shrugged her shoulders, and took up her glass, while Evelyn shook hands with some men who had

come in, and after a moment Lensky went out, appearing a moment later in an opposite box, where he sat chattering French with the wife of the French Ambassador.

"Queer chap, Lensky," observed one of the newcomers, "they say he speaks eleven tongues."

"He has been weeping over our friend Mimi," returned Lady Alys, carelessly, "he is a sentimental little wretch. Nerves, I dare say."

"Not he! I've seen him lose £5,000 without moving a muscle of his face. And he's the best pistol-shot in town. He's the hardest little beggar I know!"

"Then I must say I can't understand his getting so on edge over this stuff! If it were Wagner now," commented Lady Alys, who went to Bayreuth religiously and knew nothing whatever about music.

Pam turned. "It's simply that he enjoys music and is not ashamed of showing his feelings," she said. "Surely that is perfectly understandable? He is absolutely unaffected and natural, and therefore he is misunderstood!"

Lady Alys stared.

"Is it! You seem to be very sure about it,—though we have known him for years——"

Pam laughed. "I was brought up abroad and have seen more than one brave man cry over music."

The man who had made the remark about Lensky's pistol-shooting nodded solemnly. "Yes, he's brave enough, Jack is. Queer little chap in some ways, but he's all there——"

Lensky came back a few moments later and wept again

when Mimi died, and Lady Alys, apparently deciding to change her tactics, wiped her own perfectly dry eyes and murmured that it was too exquisite.

As they were leaving the box it was decided that they should all go to her house and see what kind of a supper they could get, and Pam very sleepy, and longing to get home, found herself a little later sitting on a low chair by a fire with Bill Compton, while Lady Alys, Lensky, Evelyn and Hetley were busy with a "chafing-dish" in the next room.

Bill Compton had been drinking, and as usual, when in that condition, was very confidential.

He told Pam that he liked her, that he trusted her, that he knew the minute he set eyes on her that she was a good sort. Then he added, fixing her with a watery stare, "that chap Lesky—Lensky—is making love to my wife, and I'm going to stop it, by Gad!"

"How?" asked Pam.

This question he found worthy of the profoundest attention, and then, after a reflective pause, answered that all women were beasts, and the Wentworth women the worst of the lot.

"Poor's a rat when I married her," he continued, "and look at her now! And look at the way I treat her. I mean, the way she treats me! He'll get sick of her, though." Judging by her own observations that evening, Pam thought this contingency an extremely likely one, but she did not say so. "She's crazy about him," he resumed, while she suppressed a yawn. "Not that I'm accusing her of any-

thing, you understand," with drunken dignity,—"it's just foolin', but it's disgustin' foolin'."

"It's only a manner," consoled Pam, her eyelids falling over her eyes, "just a sort of modern mannerism."

Mr. Compton took her hand. "You're a sensible woman, Mrs.—Mrs.—sensiblest woman I've seen for a long time——" At this point Lady Alys called them to supper and Pam escaped, to her great relief.

Never, in all her years of poverty and loneliness, had she been so bored as she was at that supper. Evelyn was dull, Lady Alys, in the triumph of Lensky's renewed devotion, noisy and silly, Ratty and his Dolly oblivious of everyone and everything but themselves, and Bill Compton, as he grew drunker, growing more embarrassing. It was a ghastly meal to which no one brought even an appetite, and when at two o'clock the depressing and depressed party broke up with loud thanks for an awfully jolly evening, Pam, whom Evelyn dropped in Westminster, vowed a vow to herself that she would never again allow herself to be so bored.

"Pilgrim," she said, as the old woman who had heard the carriage, helped her undress, "the world has changed since *my* young days!"

CHAPTER V

LENSKY came to tea the next day, and Pam took him all over the house, showing each individual treasure, and listening with respect to his edicts regarding the china in the cupboards, for he was, as he put it with one of his quaint outbursts of slang, rather long on china.

And to her delight she learned that she possessed some Lowestoft, and some very good old Chelsea, as well as the bedragoned Crown Worcester that even her uneducated eye had recognised.

"This teapot," he told her gravely, holding it in his hand and bending his sleek head over it until he looked as though he were about to kiss it, "is delicious. I have seen only a little of this rose-colour. It is quite one of the most beautiful bits I know."

Pam took it. "Do you *really* like it so much?" she asked.

He flushed with enthusiasm. "But I tell you I *know* it is good! Old Chelsea is my hobby. It is a wonderful piece!"

They went back into the white study and sat down, Pam nursing the teapot in her arms. They had had tea, and the fire glowed cosily.

"I have so often thought of having you here," she began abruptly, and then paused, distressed by her own tactless-

"'IT IS A WONDERFUL PIECE!'"

ness, but he apparently had not noticed it. Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, he smiled.

"How good of you! And I am so glad to come; I hope you will let me come often?"

She had rather dreaded his first visit to her here, fearing the effect of her charming surroundings, but he seemed to have entirely forgotten the episode in St. Giles' Churchyard. There was neither the least embarrassment nor the least sadness in his manner, so that she too was quite comfortable, and began to feel that she might be as fond of him as she liked, without danger of hurting him.

"Do come often. I'll tell you a secret. I was bored to death last night."

"Were you?"

"Yes. I didn't mind the dinner and the opera, but it was too awful at Lady Alys'!"

He laughed. "Was it? I am such a frivolous little wretch, I suppose,—I enjoyed it, rather."

"Did you enjoy the Honourable Bill?"

"Well, no; Bill is rather awful. But I hate going to bed, and like fooling about with a lot of pretty women."

"I like pretty women, too; but I'd like 'em better if they didn't talk. The truth is, I'm *old*."

"How old are you?"

"Eight-and-twenty last week. By the way, how old are you?"

"Guess."

For a moment she reflected, studying his smooth face as he looked serenely at her. "Twenty-nine?"

"I am thirty-four. I don't look it, do I? Though Heaven knows I haven't taken care of myself in any way."

Pam was astounded. He really looked remarkably young.

"It's your eyes," she announced, after a moment's thought.

"My eyes?"

"Yes. You have no lines round them, and then——"

"And then?"

"Well,—they look good. Oh, I know you're not good,—that is, I know you are no saint,—but your eyes haven't got that horrid, swollen, *fast* look——"

Lensky rarely laughed aloud, but he did now, and for the first time she saw his teeth, small, and even, and white, with one or two specks of gold. "Oh, you are funny," he cried, "so funny! So I am not a saint, and yet I haven't swollen eyes? I am glad. But who has been telling you that I am a rake and a gambler?"

She shook her head. "A large, wise bird. Is it true?"

Quite suddenly his face was grave. "Yes," he returned, "it is true, but you must not like me the less. I do nothing for which I must blush——"

It was Pam who blushed. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she cried, rising and standing before him, the rosy teapot held to her breast, "I don't know what possessed me to say such a thing! I like you more than anyone on earth except—don't laugh,—Pilgrim, and I don't care a button *what* you do, I shall always like you and always be your friend."

He rose and took her hand. "Thank you, Miss Yeoland. I am very grateful, and very—proud."

"Then,—take the teapot as a—a ratification of our treaty, will you? I have wanted to give you some little thing as a sort of souvenir. You don't know, you have no idea, what your friendship meant to me when I was so alone. I was not unhappy, you know, but I was lonely, and you came, and didn't mind my living in that awful house, or my clothes, or anything, and—*please* don't say no," she urged, pressing the teapot into his hands, "it will make me so happy to know you have it." As she finished speaking the door opened and the Duchess appeared.

"Jack! You here!"

Pam flew at the old lady, who, very mountainous in her velvet and furs, could hardly get into the tiny room, and kissed her.

Then Lensky, the teapot in his hand, approached and kissed her glove. "I knew you two would like each other," laughed the Duchess, "but I didn't expect to find you here yet. What are you doing with that teapot, Lensky?"

Pam shot a quick glance at him, and he answered quietly, setting it down on the table, "It is mine, Duchess. Do you like Chelsea?"

But the Duchess was full of a grand scheme for taking Pam to a reception the next afternoon, and then home to dine at her house.

"The Pockington's are coming, and Henry is crazy to see you. He was always a great admirer of yours! Then I've asked Evelyn and the Fat Boy, as cousins, and the Fat

Boy's Hetley girl, and one of the Japs,—a very intelligent little man, a marquis or something, in his own country," she added, with insular condescension, "and several others. I was *so* annoyed with Evelyn for getting you first, for you were always 'my girl,' as children say, and I wanted to have you under my wing. Can you come, Lensky?"

The old lady had lived abroad at one period of her not uneventful life, and called Continental men by their family names, in the Continental fashion.

"I am very sorry, Duchess——"

Pam sat quite still. The net was closing round her. Poor and unbeautiful though she was, she knew that she would not pass unobserved; and introduced to people by the most popular Duchess in Great Britain, she was bound to be invited to all kinds of things at all kinds of houses.

For one despairing moment she longed for the obscurity of Huntley Street, and then summoning up her courage, she answered, "Dear Duchess,—I have lived alone for so long,—please let me come and lunch alone with you. I am a savage, I sat as mute as a fish last night at Evy's, and bored them all to death,—didn't I, Mr. de Lensky?"

"Yes, you must have bored Lensky horribly; that's why he has called the day after he met you! Nonsense, Pam. You may do as you like afterwards, but you must dine with me to-morrow."

"Very well."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

A moment later Lensky took his leave, carrying the tea-

pot, to which he made no further reference, and the old lady sat over half-an-hour talking about him.

"They say Alys Compton is making a perfect fool of herself over him. Was she there last night?"

"Yes."

"Of course. She and Evelyn used to be great friends, and now that they are rivals Madame Evy doesn't dare drop her! How did he behave?"

Pam laughed. "He seems to enjoy homage."

"He does, I dare say. They all do. But I am glad that you and he like each other. I like him far the best of all the young men about town."

When she rose to go, and Pam was hooking her sable coat, the Duchess remarked casually, "Henny will be glad to see you again, my dear, and so will James."

"James!"

"Yes. He wasn't coming,—to the dinner to-morrow, I mean, but when I told him you were coming he at once asked permission to change his mind. He said he saw you at the opera last night, and that you had changed so little he expected to see the monkey pop up beside you."

When she was quite alone Pam sat down on the old bear-skin by the fire and gave herself up to thought.

CHAPTER VI

IT is very unusual that in an hour of stress and indecision a woman has literally no one to whom she can turn for advice, and this was Pam's condition now as she faced her problem. Beside Pilgrim, her only two friends were the Duchess and de Lensky, and even if she had had the habit of counsel-seeking, she would not have consulted either of them.

And it is a curious fact that while, in her years of struggle she had never missed the counsellor she might have had, now, in her prosperity, when things were going so well with her, she felt a vague longing to tell someone her trouble, and to abide blindly by that someone's decision. In two words her situation was this. If she refused, after having promised, to go to the Duchess' dinner she would undoubtedly offend, and not improbably alienate the old lady's long-suffering affection for her, whereas if she went she must renew her acquaintance with James Peele, the man whom, more than anyone in the whole world, she most wished to avoid.

After her solitary dinner the girl called Pilgrim and they went for an hour's drive in a hansom.

Pam loved the crowded evening streets, the lights, the bustle, the glimpses of people in evening dress on their way to the play. And the deft swiftness of the hansom suited her

thoroughly. She could think and plan far better when moving than when sitting still, and as formerly she had gone for long walks when she had some tangle in her brain, she now often went hansoming.

To-night, however, she found no inspiration in the easy movement. Try as she would she could discern no way out of her dilemma, and she sat back in her corner frowning hard as the horse threaded his impertinent way through the crowds of Piccadilly.

It seemed to her that she had but a choice of evils; that she must either offend the dear old Duchess or open for herself the door to a way full of pain and trouble. She no longer loved James Peele, but she had so loved him that the scars had never really healed, and still hurt and throbbed under the least pressure.

After going to his house and seeing his child she had been miserable for weeks, and she knew that if brought face to face with the man himself, if his cold eyes should look again with that peculiar softening, into hers, the old memories would rise up from their long sleep as keenly alive as ever. And the girl had suffered much, and wished to be happy. She had refused Lensky without a moment's hesitation because, with a self-knowledge very rare in a woman, she knew that she bore Peele's mark and would bear it to her grave. She had never seen the man since that early morning in Cornwall when she had bidden him good-bye and gone her lonely way into the unknown, but she remembered his face with an appalling distinctness, and feared it as she feared nothing else in the world.

And if she went to the dinner she must see it again, the keen, thin face with its grey eyes that looked so hard, and that she, and, she instinctively knew, she alone, had seen soften with tenderness and burn with passion.

"I do not love him now," she told herself sincerely, "but if I saw him again I should love him again,—and I should rather die than do that. But what can I do? Oh, if I could only be ill."

Her mind was so intensely concentrated on the dilemma of the moment that she did not realise that even if she could devise some means of evading the dinner the next evening it would be but a postponement of the moment she dreaded.

Bue she felt, for all her distress, absolutely well, and to feign an illness did not occur to her.

And when, at about ten o'clock she went to bed it was with the consciousness that she would lie awake for hours. The fire-light danced on the white panelling and painted queer shadows on the ceiling; from time to time Big Ben sang a fragment or the whole of his prayer; the old house was perfectly still, and without fear Pam told herself that now was the time when the little gentle ghosts of its old inhabitants no doubt stole quietly about the passages and sat on the chairs they had loved during their lives.

And Peele? Must she see him? Must she, after all these years, walk of her own accord into the danger that his presence meant to her?

Could she not find some way out? If she wrote to him and asked him frankly not to go to the dinner?

But Pride forbade that.

If she told the Duchess that she did not wish to see him? But the Duchess would ask questions, and understand more than she was told.

In her baldachined bed with the be-starred silk curtains Pam tossed and turned, too warm one minute, too cold the next, miserable, undecided, helpless.

At last, as Big Ben told her that it was two o'clock, she rose, and putting on a dressing-gown and slippers crept down the dark stairs towards the study. She would get a book and read herself to sleep.

The ashes in the fireplace in the study were still warm, she saw, when she had taken "Tommy and Grizel" from the table. One stick would make a fire!

So kneeling, a little grey ghost, on the rug, she worked until a wee flame was fighting its way into life, and then, her mind back with her problem, knelt on, forgetting where she was.

A sudden stealthy sound caused her to turn, and with a little scream she fell back. A man stood in the door looking at her. "D-don't be afraid," he said, hurriedly, "I am not a burglar."

"Then—what are you doing here?" she whispered, her throat dry, as she rose, drawing her dressing-gown closer together.

"Well,—I *am* a burglar, then,—that is,—but—I'll go."

He was a tall, thin man, still under thirty, apparently; his clothes were wretchedly ragged, his boots broken, his chin dark with a young beard.

Pam looked at him and fear left her. "What do you want?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Anything that will sell for a few pounds. Don't be frightened. I haven't taken anything——"

"I am not frightened. You—you are a gentleman."

"I used to be one; yes. Now I'm a vagabond."

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well,—there's a jug of milk and some Plasmon biscuits on that table behind you. Help yourself."

The man stared. "Would you mind telling me who you are? And what's become of old Mother Pounder?"

"I own this house; my name is Yeoland. Mrs. Pounder has gone." As she spoke, it suddenly occurred to her that her visitor must be the man who had sold the house to Burke.

"You are Cyril Wantage?" she asked, quietly.

"No. My name is—Smith." But his flush had betrayed him.

"Drink that milk then, will you? And listen to me. This house was left to me by Mr. Burke, when he died——"

"Old Burke dead?"

"Yes."

Wantage took some milk and drank it.

"You must have been—pretty badly off to get to—this pitch," she went on. "I have been very poor myself; so

poor that I've had to pawn things,—and I know something about poverty—and I will help you."

"This is—a queer way to receive a burglar."

He appeared to be an irrepressibly light-hearted rascal, this whilom gentleman, for he was no longer embarrassed, but had sat down and was eating biscuits with relish. This mental attitude was more or less explained by the bony structure of his brow and jaw.

"You haven't—burgled. And I know who you are. Mrs. Pounder told me about you."

"You—you won't tell old Pounder, will you?"

"No. Now,—you are very poor, I see. Will you tell me—about things?"

"Yes. May I sit by the fire? I've been in a cold sweat ever since I got in,—by the way, your parlour-maid ought to get the sack. She's been out until a few minutes ago, and stood talking for nearly an hour with her young man at the Chimes Lane door; that's how I got in,—slipped past them. Well,—as a matter of fact I didn't come to really—burgle, —but to take one or two things of my own that I forgot and left when I sold the place to old Burke."

"You sold the house, as it stood, to him," commented Pam, drily.

"Yes, but there were one or two things that my mother gave me and that—I thought I'd get and sell."

"What are they?"

"Well——" Mr. Wantage finished the milk, turned the jug regretfully upside down over his glass, "there was a

set of ivory chessmen, an ugly old tea-pot, and some other things."

Evidently relieved beyond all reason by the reception he had met with, he told his story, whitewashing himself more to himself than to his hostess. "I told Burke at the time that I'd want these things some day, but when I had the money I forgot all about 'em, so you see they really are mine."

"I'll take your word for that. But why didn't you come and ask for them."

"Well,—you see, I've gone down in the world a good deal, and—I didn't like to see old Pounder; she'd have told my aunt. I suppose," he added with what he evidently believed to be an engaging candour, "I was ashamed. I didn't intend to break in here, when I came out to-night; I just walked past the house,—it's a habit I've got—and—when the chance came, I—seized it. You are very good to take it so quietly, and—I'm glad I didn't take the things. I'd have been sorry to-morrow, I suppose. But—I give you my word the things *are* mine, and I *did* tell old Burke about 'em—perhaps you'd let me have 'em? You see, I've been without work for weeks, and—my wife's ill."

Pam's heart contracted with pity, not for this light-hearted young scoundrel, but for his wife.

"You have a wife?"

His face grew serious. "I have an angel of a wife," he said, with a certain dignity. "She's a lady—the daughter of a clergyman in America, and when I got so bad and they offered to take her back, she—refused. She's got—consump-

tion, and is dying for lack of the things I can't get for her. Even when I try to steal for her," he added with a graceless but somehow pathetic grin, "I seem to fail."

Pam, who had sat down, rose.

"I have given away the teapot," she said, "but I'll have it valued and give you the money. I will also see what I can do to help your wife. You must go now, but if you give me your address, I'll come to see her early to-morrow morning."

"Will you, really? It *is* good of you. Poor Mary. I have tried to work, honour bright I have, but I'm an all-round failure, you see——"

"Yes," returned Pam, with a not unkindly laugh, "I *do* see! And I am awfully sorry for her. What's the address?"

"No. 7 Snow Street,—just off Smith Street."

She wrote the address on a bit of paper, and then, opening a drawer took from it a sovereign and gave it to him.

"'On account,'" she said, to spare his feelings. But he only laughed. "This ought to make a good short story, oughtn't it?"

She let him out into the raw night, and then went back to bed.

CHAPTER VII

SNOW Street seemed, in its muddiness, its dinginess, and above all in the uncandid air of its swarming inhabitants, curiously ill-named. Pam, attired in one of her oldest skirts and jackets, and a hat at which her house-maid had stared in scornful surprise, reached No. 7 at about half-past nine on the morning after her interview with Wantage.

Her problem about the Duchess' dinner was still unsolved, but in turning her whole attention to the question of being of use to the unfortunate woman who had married the irresponsible Mr. Wantage she had found the kind of relief experienced by a person with an indigestion who suddenly changes his diet.

It was quite possible that Wantage, under the pressure of his debts, had left many things in the house that he would, on reflection, have kept, and it seemed to Pam as she went up the filthy stairs of No. 7 that these things, or their equivalent, ought in common justice to be given to him. He lived, he had said, on the third floor of the house, and after knocking twice at the wrong door, she found the room.

It was a sickening place in which to find a lady. Beyond the bed, two chairs, and a table, there was no furniture, and the dirty floor was not even whole. Pam had been in worse rooms, but their inhabitants had been very different from the girl in the bed.

"You are Mrs. Wantage?" she asked, a knot in her throat.

"Yes. And—you are—the lady who has Cyril's old home. He told me that he had been to see you."

Pam drew a chair to the bedside. She was not a born nurse, and if her life had been the ordinary one of well-bred girls she would doubtless have had a decided dislike for sick people and sickrooms. But she had learned through seeing suffering, to have a very poignant and active pity for it, and as she took in hers the hot hand held out to her, she slipped her left arm under the sick woman's head and turned her pillow.

"Oh, thank you!"

Mrs. Wantage smiled gratefully at her, but it was the smile of an equal, and Pam realised with a pang of relief that Cyril Wantage had not lied. His wife *was* a lady.

And full-grown, perfect in every detail, Pam's plan sprung from her astonished brain to her lips.

"Your husband left a lot of his things in the house when he sold it," she said, sitting down, "so I owe him a good deal of money. Rather pleasant for you, isn't it, though hard on me! Now the first thing to be done is to get you out of this, and I have a grand idea. Will it bore you to listen to a letter I received this morning?"

"Oh,—of course not——"

"'Dear Miss Yeoland,'" read Pam, taking the letter from her pocket, "'I write to tell you that I am very well, and nicely settled in the house, which is very comfortable. I have

three large rooms for lodgers and shall be so glad when summer comes and you come. I thank you very much for the carpet you gave me. It is very useful. It is very warm here, and two of my rooms look out over the sea. I hope you are well and am yours respectfully,

"'MARTHA POUNDER.'

"This Mrs. Pounder was your husband's housekeeper, and then Mr. Burke's caretaker. I couldn't keep her, so she has gone back to her native village, and as you see wants lodgers. Now Mrs. Wantage,—I'm going to take you down to Bumblemouth this very day. Will you come?"

Mary Wantage cried for a long time, but hers were the kind of tears that hurt neither the shedder nor the beholder, and when her husband came in a few minutes later with the breakfast he had gone out to buy, he found her partly dressed and sitting on the bed while Pam combed her long, fine hair.

Irreclaimably happy-go-lucky and weak though he was, and convinced though Pam felt that, if she had not caught him the night before, he would have helped himself to any of her possessions that he might have fancied, it was evident that he was really devoted to, and appreciative of his wife.

His eyes filled with tears as Pam gave a bald outline of her plan, and then when he had built up the fire and borrowed a kettle from a neighbour, he made tea and sitting on the bed fed it by spoonsful to the invalid, in the tenderest manner.

"You must get some better clothes, and some boots," re-

marked Pam after a while, "and when you have got them on, go to—my house and ask to see my maid, Pilgrim. I'll write her a note if you have any paper."

The note, asking Pilgrim to give to the bearer a certain jacket and hat of her mistress', being written, and some money having been transferred from Pam's pocket to Wantage's, he departed, and the two women were again alone.

"He is *so* good to me,—you have no idea," began his wife, with a certain air almost of pride. "And things have gone so badly! He has been out of work for months, and the worse his clothes got, of course the less chance he had of finding anything to do."

"What can he do?"

"Well,—he writes a beautiful hand (he can't keep accounts), and he was in a shop in Victoria Street for a while, but—he made mistakes. Then he tried being waiter in a restaurant, poor boy, but someone was rude to him and he left. He is the best natured man in the world, but he is sensitive and—it's always harder for a gentleman to become a common man than for a common man to become a gentleman."

Pam thought that she understood. She knew too much of human nature, young though she was, to entertain any hopes of reforming the former owner of her house. He was, she saw, a kindly, not unintelligent youth with a gentle manner and a merry heart who could never do more than drift with the stream. If his stream had been the placid one of even comparative affluence, his career might have been

an apparently successful one, but the turbulent waters of poverty had wrecked him, for he was rudderless and without a compass.

When he came back, dressed in a cheap suit of dark blue clothes with a collar and a tie, his chin cleared of the disfiguring stubble, she took her leave, and an hour later, having sent a note to the Duchess explaining that she was leaving town with a sick friend, she stopped in a four-wheeler at No. 7 Snow Street, picked up her protegés, and passing her own door and adding Pilgrim to the party, told the cabby to go to Victoria Station.

She had, for the moment, evaded the annoyances that had threatened to beset her, and this thought lent a keener edge to her pleasure in helping the poor little girl around whom she held her arm, to support her when the terrible coughing fits came.

"Pilly," she said, as they reached the station, "do you remember how Father used to call our wanderings 'Pilgrim's Progress'?"

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK had passed, and Pam was still at Mrs. Pounder's in Bumblemouth.

The village, straggling and world-forgotten, lay near the centre of a cosily encircling crescent whose seaward-stretching arms formed a barrier against the east wind. Seen from the downs over which one drove from the station, it looked like a clumsily sprawling spider with many legs and only three feet—the feet being small clusters of cottages that had withdrawn themselves from that great centre of life, Bumblemouth proper, and formed themselves into settlements under the names of Little, South, and East Bumblemouth. Mrs. Pounder,—she was a born Scuddle, and the Scuddles are of the best local blood—had rented a house in Little Bumblemouth; a small but comfortable cottage near the Church and therefore highly desirable for lodgers.

About two miles away some big London doctor had built a sanatorium and, there being no satisfactory inn within easy distance of it, friends of the inmates, and friends of those friends who were desirous of cheap sea air, quartered themselves on the villagers, a profitable arrangement for everybody, so that the place was now beginning to be known as an excellent substitute for more expensive ones farther south.

Mrs. Pounder's joy over her first batch of lodgers was great. Mr. Cyril, who after long being, in her imagination,

dead and buried, now turned up buoyant and full of jokes, was to her something between a god and a delightfully wild young man; and his wife, poor gentle little Mary, only second to him.

Pam, not belonging to the family, was of course inferior to them both, but, in her character of open-handed capitalist, and the beneficent goddess who had whisked the adored ones hither in her car, also greatly to be considered.

Her curious habits surprised but did not greatly trouble the philosophical Mrs. Pounder, who finding that when Miss Yeoland was late for her meals she consumed without protest their leathery remains and never asked for the usual omelette, came to the conclusion that though obviously not quite sane, the young lady had her good points beside that of reuniting faithful old servants and their long-lost masters.

Mary Wantage lay day after day on the sofa near her window, her hollow eyes half-closed, her husband reading aloud or talking to her. And he, when he was tired of sitting still used to go and chat with the old fishermen on the quay. They all swore by him after the first day, and learning from Mrs. Pounder something of what he himself called his hard-luck story, looked on the unconscious Pam more or less as the cuckoo in the nest.

"You'll have to work, you know," Pam said to him, one day, when he had joined her on her way home from a walk, "I am poor myself and can't support you."

"Of course! I've been answering a lot of 'ads' this morning. The trouble is I am such an ignorant beggar! I couldn't add up a column to save my life, and that seems to

be the way the greater part of Britain's youth earns its bread and cheese."

"There are other ways, however, and—bread and cheese is necessary!"

Pam, her hands in her pockets, walked very fast; her cheeks were pink with the sea-wind.

Wantage laughed, a gentle, chuckling laugh. "I don't like bread, either; and I loath cheese. Isn't it shocking?"

He looked very well after his week of comfortable fare; his unforceful face was pleasant and shrewd and apparently without a care behind it.

Did he remember, Pam wondered, that eight days before he had feloniously entered her house with intent to steal, and been caught by her?

"I was talking to the doctor an hour ago," she began again as he whistled "Pansy Faces," "and he says Mary must not think of going back to town before the spring."

"Yes, he told me, too. Poor old Pounder will be glad, won't she?"

"Yes. But—poor old Pounder must be paid," observed Pam drily. She could not help enjoying this cheerful derelict, but he annoyed her.

"Paid? Of course she must."

"But who is going to pay her,—you or—I?"

He burst out laughing and taking a cigarette from his pocket, paused to light it. "I may smoke? Well, upon my word, Miss Yeoland, as things are at present, I—I am afraid you are!"

Pam raised her eyes and looked into his pleasant face.

"Look here, Cyril," she said, speaking to him as she had done from the first, as though she was much his senior, instead of two years his junior. "I have just four hundred pounds a year, and that house to keep on it. I can't—and I won't—support you."

Not in the least offended, he nodded. "Of course not, of course not," he murmured, soothingly, "I've got to work. I hate it, but I mean to do it. Don't think I'm not grateful to you, for I am. You've been an angel to us. The trouble is that I insist on looking on myself as a gentleman, and that you, although you struggle against it, can't help regarding me as a burglar. Well,—I may be wrong, but you certainly are. My coming into your house was merely an impulse, you must remember, and—I had been drinking. Oh, I wasn't drunk, as you know, but I had had enough to think I really had a right to go in and take the things that really do belong to me. I'm not a thief, Miss Yeoland."

Pam was puzzled.

"Let's not talk about that," she said, "it makes me uncomfortable—even if it doesn't you! I only wanted to tell you this. I'll pay your wife's room and so on, and her doctor, until the spring, but you must get work and look after yourself and see about making some kind of a home for her say —in April. And you mustn't forget—the baby?"

"Of course I shan't forget the baby! And you'll be godmother, won't you?"

"Yes. I have promised Mary. And do please buck up as you say and realise that by April you must have at least

a room for her. She absolutely refuses to—to stay down here. She wants you to be with her of course."

"Of course. And if I—fail in getting work,—when April comes you'll let her starve!" He laughed softly and waggled his head comically at her. "Oh, you hard-hearted person! Well, I'll go back to Babylon and see what I can do. Will you lend me ten pounds to go on with?"

Pam had anticipated this request and was prepared with her answer. "No, I'll not. I'll never lend you a penny," she answered severely, "and I will *not* give you the china and things to sell. I believe that they are yours, but you are such a—such a goose, that you need a guardian, and for Mary's sake I'm going to be that guardian! I'll give you five pounds now, and when you have got some work, I'll give you a week-end ticket down here every fortnight. And I'll not give you one penny more. Understand?"

He understood, and appeared to be outrageously cheerful in the prospect.

He was altogether a preposterous person, and the girl knew that he could in the nature of things never be much better, but her heart invariably softened to him when she saw him with his wife, for he loved her and cared for her with the tenderness of a gentle woman, and her belief in him was so great that when they talked together of the future he gained a very pathetic kind of transitory dignity that made Pam miserable.

After ten days or so he left Bumblemouth for London, where he was to see one or two people who had by the means of the press expressed needs that he might be hoped to fill,

and after seeing his departure (with two roast fowls and a huge plum cake, gifts of the sorrowing Pounder, in his portmanteau), Pam left his wife and the landlady to talk over his excellent qualities together, and went for a walk.

She too must soon return to town, and as yet her future looked chaotic. The time had come when she must definitely make up her mind.

The Wantages had occupied that mind for many days, and had thus been a boon to her, but now she must dismiss them and open the doors to the question of her future manner of life.

Should she decide to live as an eccentric elderly girl, accepting no invitations to houses where she might meet James Peele, cribbing and confining herself out of fear of him? Or should she take the bull by the horns and boldly go to the Duchess's, where she would certainly meet him, and trust her own common sense to carry her through the ordeal?

As she walked over the downs towards the southern tip of the crescent within which Bumblemouth lay, she asked herself these questions over and over again.

She did not love James Peele, she declared, but she had loved him; she had never, even in the most visionary way, loved another man, and she still feared his power over her.

Years ago, when almost a child, she had been shrewd enough to see the man as he really was, and, at the last, to despise him, and now she understood even more fully the extent of his impulsive baseness in the crucial moment to which her own folly had paved the way, and he had so cruelly failed her.

Half of the time she had lived had passed since then, and she had not wasted it in idle dreaming. For weeks at a time, she had not given him a thought, and his memory had grown less and less poignant until she had believed herself to have almost forgotten him.

Then her visit to his house had roused in her the old fear of seeing him, and now she must decide what was best for her to do. If only there was someone who could advise her! Never before in her life had she so longed to sink her own will in another's.

Having reached the end of her walk she was staring at the tumbling grey waves before her. "I never could make anyone believe that I don't love him," she thought despondently, "and yet—God knows I don't. I wish,—oh, I wish——"

As she turned to go back she found herself, as she had found herself that day in St. Giles' Churchyard, face to face with de Lensky.

"Oh, I *am* so glad to see you," she cried, feeling at the sight of his placid face as if all her troubles were over. "So glad!" He seemed such a refuge from worry, so above all mental see-sawing, so strong and sane and serene, that she clung to his hand with both hers and drew a deep breath of relief, the chill sun lighting wee warm lamps in her eyes. "How did you know where I was?"

"I asked the Duchess. I am going to Poland to-morrow,—on business, and I wanted to see you first. What is the matter?"

"Nothing,—everything. But I can't talk about it," she

answered hurriedly, the reticence of years binding her tongue.

He stood still, looking close into her face.

"You are bothered," he said, "and things are going wrong. Why don't you marry me and let me take care of you?"

"Oh!"

"Yes. Look here; you like me so much that you would soon learn to love me,—for you love no one else."

She was silent for a moment, and then said slowly, "It is that that is worrying me. I don't love him; I give you my word I don't, but I did love him, and—I am afraid."

"Afraid of what, my dear?"

"Of seeing him. What if I should—again?"

"I see. Do you like him?"

"No."

"Do you respect him?"

"No. But—he—he charmed me,—his eyes,—his manner —and if I live in London I shall have to see him——"

Lensky took her two hands in his. "Marry me," he said.

"But——"

"I accept all the buts,—and all the risks. Marry me."

"If—if you don't love me very much," she answered, "I might; but if you did,—it would be dreadful."

"Would it?"

"Yes."

He smiled tenderly at her. "Do you think that I love you too much? Does my emotionality bore you?"

She burst out laughing. "No, no!"

"Then marry me. But first, listen. I have been, as you know, a gambler; I have wasted most of my patrimony; I have done many things that I could not tell you; I have also—drunk."

"And you want me to marry a gambler, a—*roué* and a drunkard?"

"No," he answered, very softly, his face suffused with an innocent, rosy blush, "I want you to marry a man who will never again touch a card, do an unworthy thing, or drink a drop more than is good for him."

Here was strength, and peace, and rest.

Pam looked at him, meeting his earnest eyes. "Then—I have told you all about it," she said slowly, "and—if you still do really want me, I will."

CHAPTER IX

AT four o'clock that afternoon, having accompanied Lensky to the station and then lunched with poor lonely Mary Wantage, Pam was sitting on one of a flight of steps roughly cut into the cliff leading to the most eastward bit of beach in the neighbourhood.

The wind had gone down, and a pale film of sunlight lay on the grey waters on which the girl's unseeing eyes rested.

She sat very still, her bare hands with loose-curled fingers on her knees.

For hours her surprise at having promised to marry Lensky was more than equalled by the strange uplifting of spirit contingent on that decision. She so thoroughly liked the man, he was so congenial to her, and her admiration for him so unqualified, that she had felt that she had, after long buffetings by wind and rain, reached home at last. Life looked simple and pleasant to her, and things that only yesterday seemed serious troubles, had now dwindled into petty worries that could not live in his presence.

And as she walked out to this lonely place her happiness almost attained the height of prayer.

But now, quite deliberately she sat and called back to her mind all the things she had for years tried to banish from it. Old scenes, old phrases, old joys and old pains. From the very beginning she recalled her acquaintance with James

Peele, and with a curious conscientiousness, tried to weigh the whole matter in the scales of justice. For the last time, she was contemplating the memory of dead things, and she wished to be most fair in every thought.

At last, with a deep sigh she said aloud, "It was really chiefly my own fault, and he did no more than act according to his own nature. And now,—good-bye. I will never, so long as I live, again think about it. And I will be happy. Ghosts," she continued mentally, "haunt only empty rooms, and now my rooms will be filled."

With a sigh of relief she changed her position, and clasping her knees, her thoughts hurried along the pleasant path in which she had set them. On and on they flew, like a flock of birds, and a soft crimson flush came to her cheeks as suddenly she found herself face to face with—a cradle. She was, whether or not altogether, a wife-woman, essentially a mother-woman, and her eyes were wet as she thought with a little shiver in her breast "I hope we'll have four or five—all boys but one, and she will be the littlest, so that they may learn to be tender and chivalrous—like him."

It was a pity that Lensky could not see her face then.

"'And of his porte as meke as is mayde,'" she repeated, aloud; "'my very parfit gentil knight!'"

She was so happy as she sat there, and so grateful to this man who made her so, that she began planning all kinds of little comforts for him.

They would live in her house, and the Oak Hall with the Little Cowley Street door should be his. Only he should have a key to this door, and the hall should be his study.

Loving liberty as she did, she had the most unfeminine respect for the liberty of others, and his should be boundless. She would live in the White Study,—joined to his room by the narrow passage with a door at each end. And upstairs, behind her bedroom, the long room with two windows,—there the fast-accumulating cradles and little beds should stand.

And with him she would be so gentle, so unselfish. He liked society, and he should have it; he enjoyed his clubs, and she would encourage him to go to them; he loved music, and she would go with him to operas and concerts, or make him go with people who better appreciated the beauties to which her ears were deaf. He should smoke everywhere; cedar-lined boxes of little Russian cigarettes should stand in every room, and large, *sensible* ash-trays.

And when he had headaches, as she knew he occasionally did, she would soothe away the pain with her finger-tips.

A quick frown passed over her heavy brows at this thought, for long ago, in an old-fashioned garden in Derbyshire, she had thus soothed pain from James Peele's head.

But the image of the man her just standard of moral measurement had long since rejected as undersized died quickly away, giving place to that of him who, she thought, as she rose and went up the ladder-like steps, loved 'chyvalrie, trouthe and honour, fredom and courtesie.'

And the feeling that Lensky gave her, a feeling of peace, mirth, and something best to be described as mental cosiness, stayed with her, lending fleetness to her feet and lightness to her heart.

"Pilly," she cried, coming into her room where the old woman sat knitting by the lamp, "guess what has happened?"

Pilly did not answer, but her scarlet gloss of countenance and purpleness of nose proving her to have been crying, Pam went on, severely, "Pilly, you have been *howling*. Well,—I suppose you felt teary, but now you must feel laughy. I have the most wonderful news for you, dear!"

"You needn't bother to tell me, Pam," returned the afflicted one, with a loud sniff; "I know. 'E came 'ere first, and it was me told 'im where to find you."

Pam, in spite of her intimate knowledge of the intricacies of Pilgrim's nature, was dumbfounded.

"Well,—but aren't you glad?" she cried. "Why, Pilly, you have been hoping it since the first time he came to Huntley Street, you know you have,—and scheming, too, in your nefarious old way."

Rushing at the old woman, she hugged her vigorously, and then sat down on the lap that, however bony it may have been, had always been to her a refuge.

"Don't spoil it all by being weepy, will you, Pilly?" she coaxed. "I am *so* happy! And you know you *hated* my being an old maid. Come, buck up, like a dear, and wish me joy. You *know* you like him!"

Pilgrim kissed her.

"I do,—indeed I do, Pam,—but—it comes hard to lose you after all these years."

"But you're not losing me, goose!"

After a few minutes she succeeded in comforting the old

woman, and sent her down stairs full of maternal pride in her nursling's new dignity.

Pam sat down by the fire. Pilgrim, she knew, had known something about Peele, but they had never talked the matter over. The girl would have liked to tell the faithful servant who had mothered her so long that that ghost was now forever laid, but the reticence born in her and encouraged by the nature of her life still sealed her lips.

"When she sees that I am really happy," she decided, "she'll know."

Just then Mrs. Pounder came in with a telegram, and Pam sat for a moment staring blankly at the orange-coloured envelope. What if he had changed his mind, and she was not to be happy after all?

Then, with a laugh at her own absurdity, she tore open the wire and read it. "To be operated to-morrow; Henrietta suddenly ill; unable to come. Please come. Eliza Wight."

CHAPTER X

REACHING London at about five the next morning, Pam went home, and tumbling into bed, slept until Pilgrim awakened her at half-past eight.

"There's a letter, Miss Pam,—and 'ere's your tea."

Pam sat up in bed, and tearing open the letter read it, while she hastily swallowed her matutinal draught.

"MY DEAR PAM—I received your wire last night, but am very sorry I can't come to you this morning before I leave, for not knowing that you were to be in town, I of course had already made one or two engagements. Au revoir, my dear. If all goes well, I shall see you to-morrow week. Once more I thank you for the great honour you have done me.

"Yours affectionately,

"JEAN DE LENSKY."

Surprisingly disappointed by this communication, Pam dressed and set out for Berkeley Square. She had so looked forward to seeing Lensky, if only for a moment, before he left. There were several things that she had been too shy to say yesterday that she had intended telling him that morning, and nervous and frightened as she was about the Duchess, she felt that a sight of him would have calmed and strengthened her. On re-reading his letter, while Pilgrim

fastened her blouse, a sensation absurdly like anger came over her.

Surely his early morning engagements could not have been so extremely important that he could not break them for the purpose of seeing the woman he had asked to marry him?

As she sped up St. James Street in a hansom her common sense reasserted itself, and with a shamefaced laugh she acknowledged that Lensky was perfectly right in keeping his engagements. Indeed, his never deviating from the path before him had as a rule a great charm for the girl, and she liked his quiet acceptance of boring people and things, his unmurmuring submission to the social laws and conventions that roused in herself such gusts of resentment and defiance, and although she still felt a little hurt, she had quite recovered her good humour by the time she had reached the Duchess's.

"If we had been married six months," she told herself, as she paid the cabby, "I should have been distinctly annoyed if he *had* broken an engagement to see me. Therefore I was an idiot to be cross." What she did not tell herself, and what she did not realise, was that if Lensky had shown any Ratty-like servitude, or even any of Peele's spasmodic recklessness of consequences, he would have disgusted and shocked her, freezing the little shoots of tenderness that were beginning to spring from the solid root of her affection for him. No number of interviews, no amount of love-making, could so have served Lensky's purpose as did his matter-of-fact carrying out of his social duties and the sobriety of his

note, and as Pam rang at the Duchess's door she realised with a start that she had been so occupied in thinking of this comparative stranger that she had forgotten her anxiety about her old friend who was ill.

Her Grace, the man said, was in her morning-room; would Miss Yeoland go upstairs?

"Well," cried Pam, opening the door and finding, to her boundless surprise, the old lady sitting by the fire, "here I am."

"Oh, Pam!"

The Duchess held out her hand, her lips shaking, and the girl, fear-stricken by something in the old face, knelt down and kissed it tenderly. "What is it?" she murmured; "can't you tell me? *Dear* Duchess, you frighten me so!"

The Duchess put her hand to her mouth to conceal its trembling. "Pam," she said, slowly, "it's—my eyes—they are going to—cut them this morning."

"To cut them——"

"Yes. Operate. To save me from—from—when one can't see. I can't say the word."

Pam looking into the piteous, wrinkled face that she saw for the first time bare of paint and powder, understood with a flash of heart-breaking pity what it must be, the fear of blindness. To be *unable* to see the firelight on the crimson satin walls, her grandfather's portrait; to hear a door open and not know who had come in. The girl's sob quieted the old woman's agitation, and she drew her hand gently away.

"Get up, dear," she said, in a voice more like her own,

"and don't be so frightened. When Henny was hurt—she was thrown from her horse and broke her leg—I sent for you because you are always brave. I—am ashamed of being such an idiot, but it was only yesterday that they told me that the—operation was necessary to—save my sight."

Pam took off her hat and jacket and sat down again. "*I* am ashamed," she answered; "just look at grandfather; doesn't he look disgusted with me? When is—it—to be, Duchess?"

"At noon."

"And—here?"

"Yes. They wanted me to go to a hospital, but I wouldn't, and Professor Mühland,—the big German, you know,—is to do it. He and Sir John Markland."

Pam felt as if she had been whirled back into her old world again. Gone the new one; forgotten the new plans; off in the distance somewhere, Jean de Lensky.

And in the present, the Duchess and her daughter, grandfather's portrait, and danger, and blood and knives and bad-smelling drugs.

When Sir John Markland and the Professor arrived they found, beside the nurse and their patient,—a Duchess brave with the obligatory before-people bravery of good breeding, —Pam. And two very different Pams they saw, of course, each looking at her from his own individual standpoint.

Mühland saw: an anæmic young woman with a nervous face and a quiet voice; a young woman who appeared to understand better than most women would have his few grudging words of explanation about the operation,—"a

refraction error—the nature of hypermetropia; the operation is called Iridectomy."

Sir John saw: A little girl with splendid dark eyes and a sudden, rather attractive smile; a little girl with whom he would have enjoyed a chat in other circumstances, because she had charm and a certain distinction of manner for all her nervousness about her old friend.

Pam never forgot that morning. She held the Duchess's hand until that hand dropped, limp from hers, and then she was banished and went back to the morning-room, which, as too small for her restless pacings, she soon deserted for the drawing-room and the hall.

From the corner under the portrait of Lord Ventnor, the Duchess's son who had died when he was a child, the whole length of the polished floor, across the hall to the foot of the stairs and back, she walked, her hands behind her, her head bent. The clock on the stairs chimed from time to time; once a bell rang peremptorily and a frightened footman scurried upstairs; once a door opened overhead. And up there, in that awfully prepared room, the big, bearded German was putting knives into the Duchess's kind little eyes from which the pencilling had all been carefully washed away.

Pam knew that the operation was a very serious one; that if it did not succeed the Duchess must be blind, as she would, without the awful ordeal, inevitably have become. Suppose the doctor should suddenly go mad and hack murderously at his defenceless victim,—suppose her heart should prove to have been weak, after all, and should quietly cease beating,—

suppose, suppose, suppose. The only spark of comfort was that in the hour of need the Duchess had sent for her, for Pam Yeoland.

Pam was one of those women who feel far more need of someone to lean on her than of someone on whom to lean. It was in her to cherish and care for, far more than, in her natural impatience, she herself could ever have endured being cherished.

In her plans for her future with Lensky she had unconsciously arrogated to herself the right of sacrifice; it was she who, by her deeds, was to make him happy, who was to make her happy not by doing, but by simply being.

The only thing she had reserved for herself, and that without any reasoning about it, was her liberty; she would jealously guard his liberty, but he should not guard hers, for that she should continue to do herself.

And now, as she paced the long room, waiting for news from upstairs, her chief feeling, beside the fear that made her hands cold, was one of gratitude that the Duchess had wanted her in her great trial. She would care for the old lady, and help her, and do, in return for this precious sign of affection, all that a daughter could do.

At length Sir John came downstairs, spic and span and smelling of eau-de-cologne.

"Well?"

"Yes," he answered, with his gay little nod, "it *is* well. Our dear Duchess will see as well as ever in a short time——"

"But—what *was* the matter? Dr. Mühland was so learned that I didn't understand a word he told me!"

Markland smiled. "And you hope that I am less learned? Well, my dear young lady, the Duchess has been suffering from what we call acute glaucoma, and if this operation had been put off for thirty-six hours she would have gone totally blind."

"Oh! And Dr. Mühland—what did he do?"

Again Sir John smiled. "It is too complicated to explain, but—he cut the iris, corrected the mischief, and now all that the patient needs is rest in a perfectly dark room until the wound is quite healed."

"Poor Duchess—in a dark room!"

"Yes,—but she came very near finding the whole world a dark room. And it was diagnosed as—biliousness!"

Then, with another look into the eyes he admired, he went his way, disappointed in her now that her excited flush had subsided, and thinking regretfully that she was, after all, rather faded, poor girl, seen by daylight.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW days later Pam knocked on the door leading from the shaded dressing-room into the Duchess's bedroom, where the old lady lay in absolute darkness.

"It's me—Pam. May I come in? I've a letter from Lady Henny, and all kinds of news to tell you!"

"Come in, my dear, come in. I am bored to the point of frenzy. How are you, and what have you been doing since I last heard you? I thought you'd be coming this morning, but you didn't."

Pam felt her way to a chair and sat down. "I have a new housemaid," she explained, "and had to have a talk with her. Besides, I bored you horribly last night, you know I did."

The Duchess laughed. "You didn't, and you know it perfectly well. Now tell me what Henny has to say."

"Well,—she is better, the pain is very much less, and she is lying on a sofa instead of in bed,—which she says is a great relief. Marmy is very well and is tremendously excited about your eyes. She sends you much love, of course, and urges you to be patient——"

"As if I couldn't give points to Job," interrupted the old lady.

"And as soon as you are able to read she will write you long letters."

"Nothing more about Marmy?"

"No,—except that he is learning to write. Poor little boy; I'd let him run wild for a year or two if I were she——"

"Old maids' children," chuckled the Duchess, stirring in bed; "wait till you have some of your own and you'll want 'em to learn to write fast enough."

Pam smiled happily in the darkness. The Duchess did not know how extremely real those future children of hers had grown of late. The girl could, in her innocent imagination, almost see them playing about the old house in Westminster. And she knew, though no word on the subject had ever been passed between them, that Lensky, too, loved children, for once she had seen him pick up and console a little girl who had fallen with a mug of beer, and only a man who was instinctively paternal could have shaken out the tumbled skirts, and reimbursed the wailing little creature for her loss, in quite that manner.

"But really, Pam," the Duchess's voice came back to her at the end of this brief excursion into memory, "you may say what you like, but I am right."

"But——"

"Oh, I know beforehand all that you are going to say, so don't say it! You always thought yourself wiser than anyone else,—you got that from your grandfather,—but the fact remains that time is passing, and that it is high time you had a husband."

Pam was silent. This was the moment for telling the Duchess about her engagement; her news would be received,

she knew, with the kindest joy; and yet a panic of embarrassment seized her, and she sat blushing in the sheltering darkness, unable to speak.

"Do you remember how absurdly you used to talk when you were very young?" continued the old lady. "How it did amuse Oswald! You were never going to marry because all married people were unhappy, but you meant to have children! An outrageous young person you were, my dear! And then your rushing off to the country to see that poor woman. How angry your grandfather was,—and with reason!"

"She was my father's wife," returned Pam, shortly, to whose mind this particular escapade had never changed its early aspect; "I'm glad I went, and I should do the same thing again to-morrow."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it! Poor Oswald, he was furious, though. He wrote me all about it, and swore he'd never forgive you."

"Poor G.F! He was very obstinate."

The Duchess laughed.

"Yes, and you, I suppose, were merely firm. That's always the way. But, to go back to our muttons, I do wish I could see you married. You have lost the Fat Boy, as you of course know."

"Yes. I was an accessory before the fact. I met Miss Hetley, too, at Evelyn's."

"Did you like her? Jack Lensky told me, but I couldn't get a word out of him about her. He is horribly close-mouthed. By the way, is he really so devoted to Evelyn?

She and Alys Compton have had a row and don't speak, so of course everyone expects his engagement to Evelyn to be announced any day."

"That day will never come," declared Pam, boldly, but the Duchess did not notice her tone.

"I often think," the old lady continued, "that it is a great pity women can't get a new lease of looks at forty. All these exquisite girls are either silly or dull, and by the time Life has knocked some wit into them they have lost their beauty. And a man like Jack Lensky, for instance, ought to have a wife both clever and good-looking,—although I must say he seems to content himself, in the way of flirtations, with only looks."

"Duchess," began Pam, "I——"

"Hush! Yes, it is! The telephone, Pam. Do go and see what it is, will you? It's in the passage beyond my dressing-room."

Pam obeyed her, at once relieved and disappointed by the interruption.

"Hullo? Yes,—this is the Duchess of Wight's."

There was a moment of confusion, of whirring and jangling noises, and then James Peele's voice said, "With whom am I speaking, please?"

After a short pause, the girl answered. "I will give any message to the Duchess."

"Are you the nurse? I want to speak with the nurse."

"I am Pamela Yeoland."

She heard a little ejaculation of surprise, and then he answered, hurriedly: "You! Pam?"

"I am Pamela Yeoland. What shall I tell the Duchess for you?"

"Er—how is she getting on,—and—my love—and—I am in town on business and hadn't time to come and see her——"

"Very well. I will tell her."

"But you—yourself," he went on, hurriedly, "how are you, and where are you living, and——" He was evidently agitated, and even over the wires his voice gave her the old pang. One hand clenched to her chest, she answered, stiffly, "Thank you, I am very well. Is that all?"

"No, no; wait a moment. You didn't come to the dinner,—I want to see you. When can I see you?"

Suddenly her old terror of him came over her so strongly that she trembled, and the only thing in the world worth considering was how she could escape him.

"I am leaving England to-morrow," she said, forcing her voice to a quiet level. "Good-bye; I will give your messages to the Duchess."

Then she rang off and went back into the merciful darkness of the sickroom.

"It was Mr. Peele," she explained, sitting down. "He sends you his love and is sorry he hadn't time to come to see you. He is going out of town to-night."

"Jim! Well, it must have seemed queer to you to be talking to him again after all these years. I wonder why you never liked him, Pam? You never did, though he charmed many people. You always were as sharp as a needle."

Pam smiled nervously in the darkness. Her sharpness had been, as that quality so often is, reserved exclusively for the use of other people, and of rather less than no use in her own affairs.

The Duchess talked on, and the girl sat wondering what she should do. If she left England, as she had told Peele she was going to do, where should she go? She had very little money for Continental wanderings, she had no wish to leave her own house, and she almost feared to leave Lensky. Should she stay on, treating her unconsidered statement to Peele as a necessary lie?

Before she had made up her mind, the door of the dressing-room opened and Peele's voice said, "My dear Duchess——"

"Jim!"

"Yes,—I have decided not to go to Torpington until to-morrow, and thought I'd run in and hear about things from yourself. Henrietta will be more contented so,—ah, how dark it is here!"

"Give him a chair, Pam,—you are used to the darkness."

"Thanks. And how are you, Miss Pam? It is a very long time since we last met——"

"Yes,—very long," she answered, steadily, through the stifling heart-beats that terrified her; "how do you do?"

Oh, his voice; his beautiful deep voice with the queer thrill in it. As plainly as if it had been broad daylight she could with her imagination's eye see his face as he spoke; the thin, clear-cut face with the deep-set grey eyes, the eyes she had seen dim with tears and dark with strong feelings;

the stern, flexible mouth; the broad brow with its deep line. All of it she could see, although it was so dark.

And while he talked to the Duchess, giving a detailed account of his wife's accident, he, too, she knew, was thinking, thinking of those past days when they two had loved each other. For he had loved her; he had misunderstood, been hard and cruel, and failed her, but he had loved her, and he would at the last have thrown up everything and married her. And it was he whom she had seen that earlier morning at the Villa, standing, weary and worn with sleepless pain, under her window. And they had had, in spite of everything, their one day in Arcadia.

With a start, she tried to think of Lensky, of her promise, of the future, but it was in vain, for the sound of this other man's voice bound her helplessly to the past.

With horror she realised that if that voice ever managed to bridge the chasm of time between the past and the present, her peace would be gone forever.

She rose. "I must go, Duchess," she said, "and you won't mind now that Mr. Peele is here to keep you company. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dear. You will come to-morrow."

"When do you leave England, Miss Yeoland?" asked Peele, carelessly, and she knew that as he spoke his mouth gave a certain little mocking twist. So distinctly did she seem to see this that as she answered she smiled conventionally in the direction of his voice.

"Very soon," she returned; and, disregarding a loud outcry from the Duchess, left the room.

CHAPTER XII

IT was a relief, on arriving at her house, to find Cyril Wantage waiting for her. He looked very cheerful and informed her with self-congratulation that he had found a most satisfactory situation as private secretary to an old gentleman in Warwick Square who was writing a book on butterflies.

"Lepidoptera Britannica, you know,—a very important work, that he's been slaving at for fifteen years. It appears that the B. P. is so hungering and thirsting for it that extra steam must be put on, so I am employed as—stoker."

"What do you do? Look up things in the Encyclopædia?" asked Pam, whose ideas on the subject of scientific research were somewhat vague.

"Not I! I help him puzzle out his early chapters—you never saw such awful writing in your life,—and when we've got a nice bit translated I copy it on beautiful smooth paper in my best hand."

Pam took off her hat and leaned back in her chair.

"I'm awfully glad you have such a nice position," she said; "Mary *will* be pleased."

He, who was sitting just about where she had first seen him, the night of his burglarious experiment, smiled cheerfully. "Yes, won't she! I don't begin work till Monday, and I'm going down to Bumblemouth to tell her. I'm crazy to tell her, the dear!"

"What salary are you to have?" she returned.

"Two quid a week. Lepidoptera don't appear to be very profitable, do they? But I work only in the mornings, and may be able to get something to do in the afternoons to help out. He puts me up, too, of course."

Pam's mind was whirling hopelessly about her own affairs, but with an effort she recalled it and applied it to a consideration of Wantage's. "At least it's better than nothing," she said, "and I'll keep a look-out in the papers for you. Now, remember, you can't afford cabs, and you *must* save part of what you earn. I have a friend who owns some houses in the Marylebone district, and I'll speak to her about a room for you in the spring, when Mary comes. I'm sure she would arrange with her agent to let you have a good one at a low rent."

Wantage rose. "Look here, Miss Yeoland," he began, with an awkwardness she had never before seen in him, "I don't say much, and I am hopelessly casual, and all that, but—I am most awfully grateful to you, indeed I am. When I was sitting here,—in what used to be my own house, waiting for you, and remembered about—that night—I—I realised that you had saved me from being—almost anything. I'm not bad, but I'm as weak as the very dev—deuce, and Heaven knows what I'd have done if I had walked off with some of—your things."

Pam's face was scarlet. "Oh, please don't. You thanked me at Bumblemouth, and," she said, "I'd much rather you didn't. Just stick to your butterflies and think of Mary,—and I shall be contented."

Having made his speech, his light-heartedness returned.

"I was nearly starving," he added, "and so was *she*,—and I had also been drinking, so there was that much excuse. But—I just wanted you to know that I'm not ungrateful. Thanks for—everything, then,—and I'll let you know how I'm getting on."

When she was alone, Pam's mind returned wearily to its treadmill, and she was sitting crouched on the divan in the dying firelight when the new parlour-maid, who, judging by her charm of face, would not be given to post-midnight philanderings, brought in a letter. The stamp was Russian, but the writing was not Lensky's, and with an awful feeling of guilt Pam saw, by glancing first at the signature, that it was from his mother.

Three pages of gracefully expressed French welcome into a family quite obviously considered by this member of it to be almost unequalled in the annals of any country. There was no gushing promise of affection for the unknown English girl, no expression of motherly longing to clasp that stranger in the writer's arms. But under the restraint and coldness that so reminded Pam of Lensky himself, it seemed to the girl that she could feel kindness and sympathy that it needed only personal contact to bring out.

And this letter, which would have chilled most girls, in her position, pleased her, and here by her own fire, with it on her lap, Lensky seemed again the real man, and James Peele the shadow. This was Wednesday, and on Saturday Lensky,—"Jack," as she now for the first time called him to herself,—would be back.

And sitting there in the little white room she laid a plan that was, in its very simplicity, wise.

She would the next day tell the Duchess of her engagement, and then she would write Peele a letter and tell him, too, and ask him not to remind her of things she preferred to forget.

"He will think I am ashamed, now that I am engaged," she told herself, pleased with her artfulness, "and surely he will not bother me again." Unconsciously, too, she counted on Peele's extreme sensitiveness to slights, and trusted that her desire to avoid him would help her in her purpose by offending him.

And when Jack was with her again these worries would fade away as they had in Bumblemouth.

Having come to these decisions, she sat down and answered Madame de Lensky's letter. By the time her letter reached the unpronounceable little town in Poland, Jack would be on his way home!

She wrote two pages,—more flowery than they could have been in English, but formal and self-contained, saying not a word about herself, but that it would give her great pleasure to meet Jean's mother, whose picture she had seen. Once she paused. Should she say that she loved him?

No; not because she did not, for, she told herself, she did love him in a way,—"*Je l'aime bien d'amitie,*"—but because it seemed to her that the lonely old châtelaine in Poland would not be in the least interested in her sentimental experiences. So the letter was finished, addressed and stamped, and dismissed from the girl's tired mind.

Jack was to dine with her on Saturday, and she would make herself as pleasant to look on as might be.

"I'll wear the white frock, and I'll prink, and I'll loosen my hair, or have Evy's man come and wave it. And we'll have dinner on the round table by the hall fire."

Her conscious pleasure in the fact that she was so glad that he was so soon coming was rather pathetic, though she did not know it. Oh, how glad she would be to see him, her dear, trustworthy little worldling!

She had, considering that they had met so few times, a curiously accurate knowledge of Lensky's character. Esteem him as she did, she accepted without a protest the account he had given to her of himself that day by the sea in Bumblemouth, and with the sense of humour so rare as applied to one's own close concerns, she smiled as she pictured him bending devotedly over Lady Alys and Evelyn—or over any pretty woman in whose company he might chance to find himself.

It lay in him to gamble, to admire women, even, as she crudely put it to herself, to "drink." He was a dandy and a mondain, who, so far as she knew, had never done anything noteworthy in any way.

And yet, comparing him as she inevitably did with James Peele, she knew that, in spite of the comparative austerity of Peele's life, and the great political usefulness that at least at one time had distinguished him, Lensky was the better man.

Worn out by thought and worry, she fell asleep that night as soon as she got to bed, her last conscious thought being one of happiness over Lensky's return on Saturday.

CHAPTER XIII

"DUCHESS,—I have something to tell you!"

Pam sat bolt upright in the darkness, her hands clenched tight on her knees. For over an hour she had been trying to say the words, and now they were said and seemed to her to be met with a kind of explosive silence.

"Don't say you're going to run away again! You promised me a few minutes ago——"

"No, it isn't that. But I'm going——" Could it really be she herself who was saying these grandiloquent words?—"to be married."

The Duchess sat up in bed audibly. "Married! Pam—*who* is he? Not the Fat Boy, after all?"

Now that it was out, Pam's relief was immense, and she drew a long, comfortable breath. "No! No fat boys for me, thank you. It's—Jack Lensky."

"Come here,—come here, you ridiculous thing,—let me kiss you! Oh, Pam, I am so glad! But—when did it happen,—and,—why, I never was so surprised in my life!"

The girl knelt down by the bed and was kissed and petted enthusiastically. "Your surprise is hardly flattering, is it?" she asked, laughing. "You are a very transparent old lady, and I know you're wondering what he, the beauty-enthusiast, can see in your beloved and delightful, but plain, Pam!"

"I wasn't," protested the Duchess, but with a tell-tale

laugh; "I was only wondering when you got to know each other well enough to become engaged."

"Surely knowing each other isn't a *sine quâ non!* It seems to me that the better a man and a girl know each other the less likely they are to fall in love. That," she added, rising and reseating herself, "sounds cynical, but it really isn't. I mean that intimacy seems to—dull the glamour——"

"Yes, yes, my dear; but never mind that. Tell me more about you and Jack. Why, you've only known him since that dinner at Evelyn's! He called the next day,—I remember rather piping my eye at that! And then you went to Bumblemouth—and spoiled my dinner, and—why, Pam Yeoland, I don't believe you! You're trying to amuse me with this tale! He went to Poland the day you came back from the sea, and he isn't home yet!"

So Pam had to own up.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she moaned, "you will bully me and tease me, and I shall die! How horrid accurate people are. Why must you tear down the veil of propriety I have draped over the affair and force me to horrid confessions! Well,—if you *must* know, indiscreet person,—Jack and I met ages ago,—last spring."

"Last spring! But where? Oh, how I wish I could *see* you. Go on, tell me; why didn't you tell me at the time?"

The bed creaked as the old woman rolled over in her excitement.

"I saw him that first day I came here, do you remember?

And then once more in a—in a shop, and then one afternoon in March he spoke to me in the Cloisters at the Abbey."

"Great Heavens!"

"I *knew* it would hurt your feelings! And he came to see me once or twice in—in my cave—and then——"

"And then the other day in Westminster he asked you to marry him!"

"He asked me to marry him in Seven Dials, before I had heard of Mr. Burke's death. So now you know all about it, and—please don't tell."

The Duchess was enchanted, jealous, sentimental, all in a breath. She felt that she had been cheated out of the match-making that should have been hers; she made plans for the wedding; she regretted that her dear Oswald could not know; she thought Pam too good for the little sinner Lensky, and the enchanting Lensky a wee bit wasted on the savage Pam.

"For you will always be a cave-dweller, you know," she remarked, "even though you've taken to a house; you always were a little savage. When is he coming back? You must both lunch here the first day I am downstairs, and I'll tell you awful tales about each other. How amused James will be! We had a long talk about you yesterday, after you left."

"Did you?" Pam's embarrassment had fled, and she went on quite easily with that part of her task that she had anticipated being the most difficult: "May I ask a great favour of you?"

"Of course you may; and I will grant it."

"Then,—you have so often said that you know I don't like Mr. Peele,—please never ask me to meet him."

"My dear child! But do you really dislike him *that* much?"

"I don't exactly dislike him, but—I'd so much rather not see him. You see,—he reminds me of things I try to forget, and he was at Monk's Yeoland, and in Cornwall when Grandfather died,——"

"Pam," the Duchess's voice was serious and rather authoritative, "I myself am not very fond, as you know, of James, but he is my son-in-law, and you are one of the people of whom I am fondest in the world. Unless you have some better reason than a vague dislike for him, I don't think you ought to ask me to try to prevent your meeting. Has he ever done anything to you that justifies a strong antipathy to him on your part?"

For a long moment the girl was silent. Then she lied,—quietly, convincingly, artistically. "No," she said, "he never did anything to me personally, but he has on me the effect that cats have on some people. For no reason whatever, but in a way that is overwhelming, I hate to hear his voice, to touch his hand, even to see his face. It makes me so uncomfortable to be in the same room with him that it is a real torture to me. That's all."

"You queer little thing! A case of Dr. Fell, isn't it? Well, but the hard part is that the poor fellow really seems fond of you, and was saying yesterday how glad he should be to see you again. He wants to dine here with you. What am I to do?"

Pam hesitated, and then said, "Well,—why not tell him what I said? I'm sorry to hurt his feelings, but he really won't care, and that will be an end to it."

"But you might get to like him; many people do! Come to lunch with him once, and try——"

Pam rose abruptly. "I can't. I can't bear the man, Duchess, and life's too short to try to like people. Please be a dear and help me out."

"All right, I will. Only—well, I'll do my best. He's coming in this afternoon——"

"B-r-r-r-r,—then I'll fly! May I bring Jack to see you, say on Monday?"

"Yes, do, my dear. And in the meantime, my love to him. I am so glad about it."

Pam walked home, for the day was fine, and now that she had told the Duchess of her engagement and secured her as an ally in the Peele matter, the girl felt that a tremendous weight was off her mind.

The Duchess would most probably hint at an absurd prejudice on Pam's part, adding that the ridiculous child really seemed to dislike him, and then he, with his morbid sensitiveness, would understand, and keep out of her way as painstakingly as she would avoid him.

After all she did not regret the letter she had been unable to compose to him.

And the day after to-morrow Jack would be back!

Crossing Piccadilly, she went into St. James Park, and pausing on the bridge, stood watching the faintly-tinted evening sky. "How I lied," she thought; "well, a lie in time

saves nine, in this case at any rate. He will be angry and avoid me, and then—later—perhaps I shan't mind seeing him." For if Jack was a shield and buckler to her, what would the occupant of that first little cradle be?

Pam had had no religious training, and she was not at all of a devout nature. She never went to church, much from a habit of not going, as many people go because they were forced as children to do so.

But she was no atheist, and now, looking up at the palely rosy sky, the feeling of gratitude to something she did not name was very nearly, if not quite, a prayer.

And oh, how good she would be, and how hard she would try to deserve this happiness.

After lingering for ten minutes on the bridge, she went on home, opening the door of her own beloved house with a latch-key—a mannish possession not always dumbly disapproved by Pilgrim, and entered into the dear place.

"Mr. Maxse is in the drawing-room, Miss," announced Pearson, the housemaid, as Pam turned to the left towards the white study.

"Mr. Maxse!"

"Yes, Miss. 'E's been 'ere some time, Miss."

Ratty stood on the hearth-rug in the peacock-room, his hands behind his back. He looked nervous and pale.

"Hello, Ratty, glad to see you. How's Dolly?"

"Look here, Pam,—I want to have a serious talk with you—what have you been doing to yourself? You look positively pretty!"

She laughed, and, sitting down, held up one narrow foot

to the fire. "Am I not always lovely? And won't you sit down?"

But Ratty would not sit down. "You asked me about Dolly a minute ago. I suppose you meant Miss Hetley?"

"I did. I beg your pardon for my familiarity, but I thought——"

"You thought we were engaged, I suppose. Well, we are *not*."

"Aren't you? The Duchess——"

"The Duchess be hanged. It's like this. She's a nice girl, and I like her, and she has some money, and her mother's dead,—and I suppose she'd take me if I asked her, but I haven't asked her—yet."

Pam laughed. "Good gracious, Ratty, why pour these tender confidences into my unsympathetic ear?"

"Don't devil me, Pam; I haven't slept for a week, trying to think. You see, everything would be all right if you'd only be sensible."

"I—what have I——" began Pam, feeling as if she had swallowed something cold.

"I can't explain it, or be poetical, or anything of that sort," pursued the Fat Boy, not without a certain dignity, "but——"

"Ratty, don't you want to smoke? Those cigarettes are very good—they are Russian, given me by—a friend ——"

"That chap Lensky, I suppose, he gives 'em tc everybody. No, thanks, I'll not smoke. And it's come to this. I simply can't ask her until I've tried you again. *Won't* you marry me, Pam?"

"Oh, Ratty! And I was so happy about you! And—I liked her so much. And I'm sure she's fond of you."

"That hasn't anything to do with it. The question is, will *you* marry me? I don't know why I want you so much, but I do, and I can't help it. If you will, I'll be awfully good to you, and I'll try never to pester you——"

"Ratty," said Pam, solemnly, laying her hand on his arm, "I am going to marry Mr. de Lensky."

Maxse stared at her for a moment, and then, tumbling into a chair, buried his face in his hands. He was very ridiculous and very fat, and very pestiferous, but he was sincere, and in great grief, and Pam's own eyes were wet as he at length rose.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," she said, taking his limp hand in hers. "And indeed I do appreciate your—your affection for me, Ratty. You will get over this, and we will be good friends always."

But even in deep sorrow Ratty could not be altogether pleasing. "Oh, *I'll* get over it, I suppose," he answered, blowing his nose, "but—I don't see what you can see in that chap! I could swallow him whole."

Pam laughed, greatly relieved by his tone. "Please don't swallow him," she said.

Ratty glared at her in indignant reproach, and after a final blast on his nose, took his leave. "You'll be sorry some day that you treated me this way," he said, refusing to take her proffered hand. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Ratty," she returned, gently.

CHAPTER XIV

"AND what did he say?"

Pam sat again in the dark room,—for the last time, as the doctors had found that the Duchess might be allowed her first glimpse of daylight the following morning,—and the old lady had just announced the accomplishment of her mission to Peele.

"I told him that you seemed to dislike seeing him, and that *I* thought it was because of his being associated with the old days at Monks' Yeoland,—etc. But he said no, that he had often suspected you of disliking him personally. He was very nice about it, though I could tell by his voice that he was hurt, and he told me to tell you that he would never try to see you. He said he had always liked you, and that he was sorry, but that of course he would avoid you in the future. I smoothed things as much as I could," pursued the old lady, "but naturally I couldn't make it an occasion of joy to either of us. Luckily, Alys Compton came in and interrupted. He asked if you were coming this afternoon, and I said yes, so he is going to run in to-morrow morning instead."

Pam drew a deep breath of relief. How foolish she had been, what a mountain she had made out of a wee molehill; and how her vanity had unconsciously led her to exaggerate the difficulties of her position!

Peele had naturally been a trifle annoyed, but he had not

really cared a straw about seeing her again. Doubtless he had forgotten all about her until accident had caused her to answer his call to the telephone.

In the darkness the girl blushed at her own absurd assumption that he had longed to see her,—that he had meant to go out of his way to get in touch with her.

"Thank you so much, Duchess," she said, with a little shiver of self-disgust; "it was awfully good of you to do it, and awfully good of him to—to be so nice about it. Now what can I do to amuse you? I am so sorry your head aches. I wish I could read to you, it might send you off to sleep."

"Yes, I wish you could. I am so tired of lying here, and so bored! Nurse Brown is a horrible woman, and you are the only person who has the patience to really sit with me,—Alys, and Lady Conisby and the rest, sandwich me between two *interesting* visits, and I hear their self-righteousness in every word they say to me! If I were not to have some light to-morrow I should murder the nurse just to diversify things a bit!"

"*Poor* Duchess!"

After a pause, the old lady said suddenly, "Pam,—do you ever *recite* now?"

"No. I haven't for years. Not since Grandfather died."

"Oh, dear; that might have put me to sleep."

Pam laughed. "How civil you are! But—I wish I could. Shall I try? I may be able to remember a few things——"

The Duchess changed her position. "Yes,—do try. My head is splitting——"

Sitting very erect in her chair, her hands clasped, Pam began. Years ago it had been one of her grandfather's favourite amusements to make her recite to him. And a motley collection of verses hers was. French nursery rhymes, bits of d'Annunzio's flamboyant poetry, "Bouillabaisse," long rhymes of Herrick's and Beaumont's and Fletcher's, selections from Burns, Shelley, and Byron, some things of Verlaine that she had heard repeated by Gemma Ravoglia, who at one time was a friend of her father's, and who remained the child's friend until she died,—a sonnet of Petrarch, and a hundred other odds and ends collected—Heaven knows how, and treasured in her uncomprehending little brain, chiefly for the beautiful melody of the words, and turned on at will, as Lord Yeoland used to say with a gentle chuckle, in an evenly flowing, unhesitating stream.

But years had passed since those days and the girl had forgotten much. At first she hesitated and stammered, giving up one selection after another, and on the point, a dozen times, of declaring her inability to continue.

And then, stumbling by chance on the exquisite chorus in Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon," "When the hounds of Spring are on Winter's traces," she found that she had not forgotten a word, and went on to the end, using her voice to its fullest effect, her cheeks flushing with pleasure, her heart beating faster. She had not forgotten, and the talent so long lying fallow she could cultivate and use to give pleasure to Lensky.

When she had finished this most lovely thing she went on

to repeat a modern Italian lyric, and then, almost without halting, several stanzas from "Laus Veneris."

This had, she remembered, greatly amused her grandfather, who forbade her reciting them to anyone else, but who evidently immensely enjoyed them himself.

> "The scent and shadow shed about me make
> The very soul in all my senses ache;"

And on through the stanza ending,

> "Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair."

No wonder her grandfather had been amused!

"What a queer little thing I must have been," she thought, pausing to listen to the Duchess's regular breathing, "and yet Father always thought I knew best!"

She must write to her father,—she should have written before, to tell them about Lensky.

Then, the Duchess stirring uneasily, she began again, her tongue beginning almost before she was conscious of directing it, a once-beloved verse of Herrick's.

> "I sing of Brooks, and Blossomes, Birds, and Bowers,
> Of April, May, of June and July—flowers.
> I sing of may-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
> Of bridegroomes, brides, and of their bridall-cakes"—

The door opening softly as she said the last words, she went on in the same tone, "Her Grace is asleep, Nurse," and then returned to the poem, finishing it for her own pleasure in the melodious syllables.

"I sing of times trans-shifting; and I write
How roses first came red, and lillies white.
I write of groves, and twilights, and I sing
The court of Mab, and of the fairie-king!"

Miss Brown had not come in, and the girl went on more softly,

"I write of Hell; I sing, and ever shall
Of heaven, and hope to have it after all."

"Do you remember saying that to me in Arcadia?"

James Peele stood near her. "Pam,—I have just come to tell you myself, that—I will not annoy you. The Duchess told me. Couldn't you have asked me yourself?"

"Hush! I—you don't mind, do you?"

Under his breath he gave a short laugh; a laugh that brought, she knew, a bitter curve to his mouth.

"Mind! Of course I do. Do you think it doesn't hurt to know that you hate me?"

Involuntarily she clasped her hands. "Oh, no,—I don't hate you, Mr. Peele,—I—I can't explain, but I really don't hate you. It is only that I—want to forget—some things, and that you remind me too plainly of them."

He was silent for a moment, and the Duchess gave a muffled snore. "I must go," whispered Pam, "and I thank you *very* much for being so nice about it——"

Stretching out his hand he found, and held, hers.

"Pam,—can't you forgive me? I behaved like a brute; I admit that, but I loved you. And I have never, either before or after, loved another woman."

His voice sunk to a deep tenderness that made her heart stand still, and her hand trembled in his.

"I have thought of it all so many times; I have cursed myself over and over for—losing my head as I did, and adding to your troubles, you poor little child. For you were only a child. If you had been older you would have understood, perhaps. But you were too young, you were even too young to really love."

Pam forgot the Duchess. "Mr. Peele," she said, sharply, trying to withdraw her hand from his, "you have no right to say that. It is not true!"

"Then,—you did?"

She could not answer. Her love for him, unworthy of it though she had long known him to be, was enshrined in the very holy of holies of her being, and his doubt hurt her to the quick.

"Pam,—I am not going to make love to you, don't be afraid. And I am going to obey you and avoid seeing you, to prove by my obedience to your wishes——" he paused. "But tell me just the one thing. Did you really love me?"

"Yes," she returned, roughly, "I did, but if you don't let me go now I shall hate you."

She was quivering in every nerve and she knew that he knew it.

For a moment he stood, his hand closed on hers with such force that he hurt her. Then suddenly he freed her and drew back. "Thank you," he said, quietly, and without another word she found the door and escaped.

CHAPTER XV

HOUR after hour that night Pam lay awake, staring wide-eyed into the darkness.

He had promised not to try to see her again, she had gained her point, ostensibly she had won the day, but she knew by the way his voice still rung in her ears, by the way her hand still felt the warm, nervous clasp of his, that the victory was not hers.

" He has promised," she said, over and over again, repeating the words as if they were a sort of charm to keep off the swarms of those poignant thoughts that hovered close round her. " He will not try to see me."

But she knew that this fact had lost much of the importance it had undoubtedly had for her before the events of the afternoon.

It was not what he would or would not do; but what she herself was feeling that counted, and at last, miserable and ashamed, she faced this fact. He had talked to her, and she had trembled; he had taken her hand in his and apparently only the mad throbbing in her breast had prevented her from falling into his arms from very weakness. And oh, his voice!

He had said that she had not loved him, then, years ago, when she would have followed him to the ends of the earth, and his voice was the voice that had talked to her in Arcadia. 'Do you remember?" he had asked.

Could she ever forget! Even with Jack, could she, now that he had reminded her again, ever forget?

She tried to think of Lensky, but his image came before her like the shadow of a dream, whereas Peele's white, set face,—white and set as it had been the day she said good-bye to him in the little station in Cornwall,—was distinct, masterful, conquering.

He did not mean to make love to her, he had said, but when a man and a woman feel as they had felt, every word uttered is love-making.

Thank God she should never see him again. Ah, yes, God be thanked, and yet——

He had never loved anyone but her. Never in his whole life. And he was a handsome man, big, and strong, and of distinct personality—the kind of man clever women are attracted to. And of all the women who must have at least been willing to be loved by him, he had loved only her,—Pam Yeoland! He had gone now; she was never to see him again; never again to feel, at the sound of his voice, that queer tightening of the chest that almost hurt. She had told him to go, and he had accepted her decree—with great philosophy. He no longer loved her,—thank Heaven, and yet——

Hour after hour the girl lay, these thoughts whirling in a great circle through her nervous brain.

She tried to smile at the thought of Lensky's return. In only—how many?—twenty hours he would be with her, dear, strong, comforting Jack. Jack who was at once strong and comforting, and amusing. Jack who—but it was not Jack's eyes she saw, nor Jack's voice she heard. Always the eyes and the voice of that other whom she did not love.

No,—one could not love a man whose face one had not

seen for nearly ten years! It was only the memory of him that was so crucifying her. She had loved him, and now the ghost of her mistaken love sat and gibbered at her in the darkness.

At last she fell asleep of sheer exhaustion and was awakened in the middle of a dream about Peele by Pilgrim's voice. "It's nearly ten, Miss Pam, so I thought I'd better wake you up. There's a letter,—from Paris."

Pam sat up in bed, the bright morning light streaming in on her, and held out her hand.

"Good gracious, Miss Pam, whatever is the matter?" stammered Pilgrim, staring at her, "you look like death!"

"Do I, Pilly? It's nothing; I slept badly. The frigid joys of my *tub matinale* will restore me to my usual beauty——" but a glimpse of her own face in the glass opposite put an end to her forced banter. The whole story, the horror, the fear, the shame, seemed written there. What would Jack say? In the meantime Lensky's letter was short.

"My dear Pam,—

"I shall be with you at eight o'clock to-morrow, Saturday, evening then. How glad I shall be to see you, and how many things we shall have to talk about. I am just off to dine at the Russian Embassy, which is a bore, as I should much have preferred going to the Folies Bergères, so good-bye. I kiss your hands, and am, "Your affectionate

"Jean de Lensky."

If he had been but a little more ardent! If he had showed any great need of her, it might have helped her. But he was

so well-balanced, so calm. He must love her, or he would not have asked her to marry him, but his love was only a pleasant accessory to his comfortable, happy life. If she had loved Peele, Lensky would have bidden her good-bye with his beautiful serene smile and gone his way undisturbed.

But she did not love Peele. He upset and hurt her, but she did not love him.

Her fear of the man was great, but she did not fear any irresistible act of her own. Even if her dead love had risen in its grave-clothes and beckoned to her, she would not have gone. She was a woman of eight-and-twenty, and she could trust herself. What she feared was the suffering, the blankness of life, the weary hours of torturing tread-mill thought, the bitterness of the husks of reward that her inevitable virtue would bring her.

When she had had a bath and was dressed, the sanity that day usually brings began to brighten her prospects.

"I was in horrible danger," she told herself, "but it's over. If I had seen him as well as heard him, I—yes,—I should have loved him again. I might as well acknowledge that. But thank God I did *not* see him, and with any sort of luck I ought to be able to avoid him,—at any rate for a long time. And then, if Jack and I have children, it won't matter. So I'll now stop thinking about him, and try to behave like a rational woman. I'll tell Jack about it,—I suppose I must? Yes, of course I must! What if——"

She shuddered. What if Lensky should, after hearing her story, decide that he did not wish to marry her! And then, how lonely, how beggared, she should be!

And yet, she must tell him; she never hesitated for a moment about that.

When afternoon came she was too restless and nervous to go to sit with the Duchess, so sending a wire to the old lady, to say that she would come on Sunday, she put on a short skirt and took a hansom to 43 Huntley Street.

Mrs. Kingdom was at home, and received her splendid caller with solemn majesty. Yes, the 'ouse went on much as usual; yes, the Bingles were still there; yes, Miss Greene and Miss Vesey was still there; Miss Vesey 'ad 'ad a habscess on 'er eyelid, very disagreeable; no, Mr. Tavistock was gone; also Mr. Hodge. Yes, Mildred was still there; yes, Miss Yeoland could see 'er if she liked.

It was not an inspiriting visit, and Miss Vesey finding it necessary, in view of Pam's improved circumstances, to talk a great deal of a gentleman friend of a lady friend of hers, who was a baronet, Pam found not much more mental pabulum on the second floor than in the basement.

Only Mildred, black-handed, red-elbowed as ever, had borne the shock of Pam's prosperity without changing, and enquired as affectionately for the heroine of the presumably-in-progress new novelette as if the author of that work were still living up three flights in the same house with her.

Disappointed, but still bent on turning her mind away from her personal troubles, Pam went next to Seven Dials, where she looked up several old acquaintances.

These visits, however, were also not wholly successful, for while the more independent Seven Diallers seemed disposed to resent her rise to affluence, and to suspect in her

all sorts of pride and vainglory, those who were more cordial inclined to borrow money of her, which, although she had come prepared to make several small pecuniary gifts, was depressing.

On her way home, however, as the street lights burst like great flowers into the dusk, her spirits rose, as they had a way of doing at that hour, and dismissing her hansom, she went homewards on foot.

It was nearly six. In two hours Jack would be with her, and then, surely, everything would be well.

She would tell him the whole truth, concealing nothing, and then—he would console her.

She had that day received from the locksmith commissioned to make it, a latch-key to the Little Cowley Street door. Until they were married she would carry it with the other one, and then she would give it to him.

Smiling at her own folly, she did not go in by the Chimes Lane entrance, but, walking to the end of the street, turned back into Little Cowley Street, and after standing for a moment looking up at the house, opened the door with the new key. As she took the key from the lock she paused, met by a waft of strong scent; the scent of a great quantity of roses. The hall was dark, and to reach the electric switch she would have had to cross to the far side of it.

It was delightful to stand there on her own threshold with this delicious odour rushing to meet her. Lensky had of course sent the roses——

Forgetting to close the door, she felt her way into the room, and had reached the end of the screen that hid the

door from the inside when a step behind her caused her to turn, and a man caught her in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

"Pam,—Pam,—it is not true that you are going to marry that man! You don't love him, you can't do it,—you can't!"

For a moment she stood as if paralysed and then wrenched herself away from him.

"Go away," she cried; "go away. I—I will not have you in my house!"

But he held her wrists tightly. "I will not go. I have been following you for the last hour. I have seen you thinking,—thinking of me! And I love you. I have always loved you, and since I saw you at the opera a month ago—I have thought of nothing but your little face,—your dear little face. Pam,"—his voice dropped suddenly, and became most gentle,—"I am sorry I frightened you, but—when the Duchess told me of your engagement to that little—*fainéant*—I couldn't bear it. And neither could you! You don't love him."

"You must go; you must go at once. I am going to marry Mr. de Lensky"—she said desperately, "oh, go, for God's sake!"

For answer he pressed her hands to his face, kissing them gently, again and again. "No. Smell the roses, sweetheart. I sent them. Do you remember the roses in—Arcadia? Do you remember our supper on the terrace, and the nightingale? Do you remember the first time I kissed you? No one had kissed you before, and no one has kissed you since. Am I not right?"

"Yes," she said, faintly. Her eyes were shut. He was conquering her, inch by inch, but he must not know it. With a great effort she drew her hands away from his face.

"You are very unkind," she began, her voice steady but quite unlike her own, "and very unfair. I am going to marry Mr. de Lensky, and—I am very fond of him. Do you want to make me ashamed?"

It was a not unskilful appeal and for a moment he hesitated.

"I am not asking much of you," he returned, after a pause, "I can't marry you, and I'd rather die than injure you in any way, but—can't we be friends——"

She burst into a little shrill, scornful, laugh. "Friends! You and I? Ah, don't *blaguez,* James Peele."

"You are right. And—if you tell me that you love—Lensky, I'll go—I promise."

"You break your promises."

"If I hadn't seen you come in,—if you hadn't left the door open I swear I should not have come. There's a letter with the roses—you may believe me. Do you love him?"

"I—I—yes, I do." But her lie was unconvincing.

Taking her hand in his he pressed his fingers to her pulse. "Pam—you love—*me,*" he whispered, his lips close to hers. And then as her traitorous heart bounded towards his at the words, he caught her to him and kissed her mouth. When she again knew where she was, he had flown, and Pearson, whose coming Pam had not heard had turned on the light.

"Oh, Miss, I didn't know you 'ad come in——"

CHAPTER XVI

HOW she lived through the dinner with Lensky, Pam never could remember. He had greeted her with a courteous kiss on her fingers, he had asked if she were ill, and then on her answer that she was quite well, had appeared satisfied, and changed the subject.

That much she could recall. But what they talked about as Pearson served their dinner by the fire in the hall, whether she had eaten or simply played with her food, if Lensky had known that something was wrong or whether, all-mechanically she had so played her rôle that he suspected nothing, she never knew.

The bright fire to her right crackled and threw splashes and sprays of light up the dark panelling of the old room; it flamed on Lensky's eye-glass and painted Pam's white skirt red. Pearson, neat-handed and light-footed, came in and out, pouring out wine, red and white, from the graceful, bubble-like Italian flasks, changing plates, offering the different kinds of food in the usual sequence. And Pam and Lensky talked, for there was a sound of voices.

At last the meal was over and without a word the girl rose and trailed her delicate skirts down the passage to the White Study.

"Please smoke," she said, offering him a box filled with his own cigarettes. Then she sat down on a stool by the fire and held her icy hands to the flames

Without a word he fitted a cigarette into his amber mouthpiece and began to smoke, his eyes quietly fixed on her face.

"Mr. de Lensky."

"Pam."

She looked up, her lips shaking. "Will you be patient while I tell you?"

"I am always patient."

Before she could begin, as she sat turning on her finger the big ruby he had seen her pawn that day over a year ago, Big Ben chimed the quarter past nine.

'O Lord our God'—

She waited until the last vibration had died, and then at last she spoke. "Mr. de Lensky, I can't marry you."

"Why not?"

"Because,—because I cannot. It is a long story, and—telling it will make no difference. Must I tell it?"

"Yes." She watched him as he knocked the ash off his cigarette and then put it back into his mouth.

"Well,—it is because I love someone else. You remember I told you that I *had* loved somebody, long ago."

"Yes."

"Well,—I still do. I don't want to; I have tried not to; but I do."

"Are you going to marry him?" asked Lensky, gently.

"No. He is married. And besides,—he is not good. I should not marry him even if he were—free——"

"Tell me about it. From the beginning."

And slowly, awkwardly, honestly, she told her story, while the generous firelight fell on her wan little face with a kindly glow, and shone in her dry eyes.

"My mother was not married to my father until I was eighteen years old—she ran away with him because he had—a wife already. And they lived together on the Continent, chiefly in a villa my father bought on the Riviera. They named the Villa—Arcadia. And it was Arcadia for them, for—they were very happy."

Sometimes her pauses were short, sometimes very long, but Lensky never interrupted her. Cigarette after cigarette he lighted and smoked, renewing them continually but noiselessly, almost without her noting his movements.

"I, of course, was always with them. Pilgrim and I. They were very good to me, but—they didn't need me."

"Oh Lord our God"

interrupted the chimes,

"Be thou our Guide"—

"And so I grew up, until I was about ten. Then one day my grandfather Lord Yeoland's, steward, Christopher Cazalet, who had always been fond of my mother, came to the Villa to look her up, and he saw me. He thought it—a pity that I should live that kind of—unusual life, without any regular education, and so on, and so he told my grandfather about me, and my grandfather had me come to live with him. I was a funny little thing, and—spoiled, I suppose, and I amused him very much. And,—Father and Mother of

course didn't know many people, and they knew some very unconventional ones,—other people who weren't married, you know; and in England the few married couples I knew didn't—*care* as Father and Mother did. I think no people ever did care as much as they do. And so I got it into my head that—that marriage was a mistake, and that all unmarried people are unhappy—(and I still think most of 'em are!) and I made up my mind that I'd never marry. You see?"

"I see."

"And then, when I was seventeen I met a man—I met *him*. He was a great deal older than I and he was engaged to a lady I knew. I admired him very much, for he was very clever and very interesting, but—that was all, then. And one day my father's—my father's wife wrote to me from a country town that she was ill and lonely, and wanted to see me. And I went. My grandfather was very angry and wouldn't forgive me for a long time, but I'm glad I went. She liked me, and she enjoyed talking to me about my father. She loved him, too." After a long pause she went on, clearing her throat, and sitting up, "And just by chance *he* lived near by, and I used to go to see him. He was very nice to me and I liked him very much. Then one day Mrs. Kennedy,—Father's wife,—Father was an opera singer, and had changed his name to Sacheverell,—died,—and I went back to Father and Mother. Oh, and Mrs. Kennedy, poor thing, made me promise just before she died, to make them marry. She thought that they were—wicked, you see,—and that she should have divorced him so that he

could marry Mother. So when I went back I persuaded them to marry, and they did. And the evening of the wedding, when they had gone away,—and I was all alone,—*he* came."

"Oh Lord our God
Be Thou our Guide,
That by Thy Help"—

Breaking off in her narration Pam repeated the quaint old words, as the chimes played the tune.

"There didn't seem much help about it then," she added, simply. "I loved him, and he loved me. And though he was engaged and it would have ruined his political career to marry me, he wanted to do it. I must," she added to herself, but aloud, "always remember that."

Lensky watched her closely, his sleek head bending towards her in the attitude so characteristic of him.

"He insisted that I must marry him," she went on after a pause, during which she pressed back into the fire a stick that threatened to fall out, "he tried his best to make me say I would. And I wouldn't. I—offered to go away with him,—as Mother had done with Father, only he wasn't married as poor Father was,—but I insisted that married people stopped loving each other, and that we must not run the risk. And then I saw the girl he was engaged to and she was good to me, and she adored him, and so, after chopping and changing like an utter idiot, I ran away with Pilgrim, deciding to give him up for ever. And then my cousin, Lady Chesney, married, and I saw him at the wed-

ding,—and it began all over again. But—his wedding-day was fixed, and it was too late to break his engagement—and —and—and then my grandfather died suddenly and my Father and Mother had gone to Japan, and I was all alone, and so he—he wanted——"

She broke off, floundering hopelessly, her face crimson.

"I understand," commented Lensky, gravely.

"And I thought he meant he *would* break his engagement,—it was very silly of me,—and when I understood,—Pilly and I came to London."

There was a long pause, during which Lensky put his cigarette holder into his pocket, and rose.

"And you never saw him again until just now."

It was an affirmation rather than a question, but the girl, rising, too, nodded. "No."

"And now you love him again?"

"Had I ever stopped?" she asked sadly.

"Poor old Pam." He took her hands and held them gently in his. "I am so sorry. And he loves you?"

"Yes. It is the same with him. Until this afternoon I thought that as—my feeling for you is so much—*better* (I have sense enough to know that),—that—the other need not count. And I meant to ask you to trust me."

"Do you mean," he asked, curiously, "that you wanted to marry me in spite of him?"

"Yes. Until this afternoon. It is very illogical and absurd, I know, but I—I do *like* you so much more than him, and I feel so—so safe with you."

For a moment he was silent, and smiling at her with

a wonderful grave tenderness, he said "Then, marry me."

But she flushed crimson, drawing away her hands.

"No, no! This afternoon he—he kissed me,—oh, I couldn't help it, indeed I couldn't,—and—and I never could marry anyone after that."

"I understand. And—you are right. Now good-bye, my dear, as your lover. As your friend it will never be good-bye." Bowing over her hand he kissed it, and as he did so Big Ben sang his completed verse:

"Oh Lord our God
Be Thou our Guide,
That by Thy Help
No foot may slide."

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

THE Mediterranean, less blue than the Adriatic, less grey than the Atlantic, seems to be possessed of an amiable indifference possibly best described by the word "jemenfichisme."

So when Nizza became Nice and the inhabitants of that part of the azure coast found themselves, when they spoke in their mother-tongue, using a foreign language, it is to be assumed that the waters lapping on that coast lapped on in entire indifference as to whether they lapped against Italian or French shores.

One can imagine the hills mourning their sold birthright; and there are those to whom the coastline is so Italian in its atmosphere that it seems absurd to call it French, but no one with any imagination can fancy even a momentary rebellion on the part of the waves that, crawling up expecting to salute Italy, found themselves bestowing kisses on France. *"Je m'en fiche,"* said the nonchalant water, and laughed as usual.

Therefore, it matters little whether the Villa in which Guy Sacheverel and Pauline Yeoland lived so many years of their lives lay in Italy or in France.

It stood,—or rather sat, for whoever stands in that sunny land, when sitting is a possibility?—in a dishevelled garden on a hill sloping back from the water, and for them was neither in Italy nor in France. It was Arcadia.

The house was a long, flat, intrinsically rather ugly build-

ing, originally covered with shell-pink plaster that even when Sacheverel bought it had faded, and that the sun and rain of twenty-eight subsequent years had mellowed to a very shabby but poetic, rosy yellow.

There was a terrace from which mossy and slippery stone steps led into a neglected olive-grove that sloped seaward; a high wall on which crept in friendly confusion roses, jessamine, and giant heliotrope; two tall stone-pines introducing into the sunny picture the dark note so effectively used by Turner; and a huge magnolia whose glossy leaves seemed on a dazzling day to give out a light of their own.

At the foot of the hill on which lay this deserted Arcadia, almost, in its over-luxuriance of flowers, worthy of the Belle aux Bois Dormant, lay a small white city; a city white and gold in the winter, white with dust and golden with sunlight, cold in the shadow, too warm in the sun, eye-dazzling, fatiguing, and stimulating at once as such cities are wont to be.

One morning in the May following the December in which she had left London, Pamela Yeoland came out on the lawn from one of the windows of the Villa Arcadia, and walked slowly down the neglected roadway towards the gate.

She walked carefully, seeking for her feet the smoothest places, keeping on the shady side of the drive; her bent head was bare, and the splashes and blotches of sunlight that came through the leafy boughs above gleamed on a dozen different shades of hair, from deep shadowy brown to a bright bronze, for her hair was plaited and arranged like a cap extending

from the nape of her neck almost to her brow, over which a few loose tendrils twisted and waved. Anyone who had seen her during those last days in London would in looking at her now have found a curious change in her face. She looked younger than she had six months before, for her face was fuller, and she was browned by the sun and reddened until her smooth cheeks were nearly the colour of a ripe peach; but something had gone from her expression, something of youth and transition, and in the firmness of her red mouth one saw that her hour of indecision was over, her way taken.

She would now no longer be called a girl as most people would have termed her a year ago. She was a woman, and a woman who had deliberately, and not without satisfaction, left youth behind her.

Even her dress showed something of a conscious aim at young middle-age, for it was of a sober brown hue, though, in deference to the heat of the day, of delicate muslin.

When she reached the unpainted gate leading to the white road without, she turned and came back to the end of the double line of trees, her head still bent, her steps almost solemnly careful, after which she again started towards the gate.

And then, on the radiant, fragrant air fell a strange indefinite noise, a noise soft and pleasant, a noise low and shy and quaint.

It was what Pam herself called for lack of a better name, singing, and she was trying to sing to the baby she held in her arms.

"Il était une bergère,
Hé ron hé ron, petit patapon,
Il était une bergère
Qui gardait ses moutons, ron, ron,
Qui gardait ses moutons.

"How do you like it, Miss Pamela Wantage?" she asked, pausing and looking down at the wee face. "*You* never heard such singing in your life, now did you?"

Miss Pamela Wantage aged a fortnight and two days, did not answer, for obvious reasons, and the song was resumed. From time to time the elder Pam glanced towards a shaded window of the Villa, and once a black-veiled nursing-sister appeared at it, pushing aside the curtain and peering out into the sun.

"Hé ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,
So tu y mets la patte
Tu auras du bâton ron, ron,
Tu auras du bâton!"

In their measured walk the two Pams had again reached the gate, and as they turned it opened, and a little man in a shabby uniform appeared.

"*Buon giorno, Signorina,*—ah, and the little one who takes the air!"

"Morning, Sandro. Yes,—she is having a walk. Letters?" the postman opened his dusty pouch and produced a newspaper and three letters. Then he took off his cap and wiped his forehead. "It is an infernal heat," he observed. "How is the poor lady?"

"She is just about the same, thank you, Sandro,—I fear very ill."

"*Già.* And if she should be taken, it is a pity that God in His wisdom didn't make the baby a masculine. The feminines need more the mother."

The man was, as Pam knew, a frank disbeliever, like many of his class, but his easy and unembarrassed references to the God in whom he had no credence, was an amiable habit, quite without sarcasm.

"And the Signorino?"

"The Little Young Gentleman is naturally very sad," returned Pam, changing the baby's moist head from the hollow of her left elbow to the hollow of her right, "but he is calmer."

It was an immense relief to her to know that Wantage, whose youthful manner had won for him the half-affectionate, half-slighting name of Signorino, was in his bed and sound asleep. His despair over his wife's dangerous illness was troublesome as well as pitiable, and the silence contingent on his slumber more than grateful to ears tortured for many hours by his loud lamentations.

The postman put on his hat. "*Speriamo,* then," he observed with pessimistic cheerfulness; "let us hope that the poor Signora will recover. The Madonna and the Saints be merciful to her." With a last friendly salute he went his way, and Pam stood looking at the letters she held.

"Dear old Duchess," she said aloud. Then she frowned, for the second letter was from Peele. The baby was sleeping soundly; would to all appearances sleep for another hour when she would, Pam knew, out of her new wisdom, roar lustily for refreshment.

After a moment's reflection the girl crossed the rough lawn to her right, and cradling the baby most tenderly in her arms, went down the steps into the olive-grove.

Here the grass was sparse and tufted, and dangerous from the twisted surface-roots of the grey old trees. Below, on the right a red roof nestled among glossy foliage, and to the left a winding path led to the glittering sea.

Pam sat down under a tree and, with a sigh of relief, for the wee baby was sufficiently heavy in her long clothes, laid the child on her knees.

First she read the Duchess' letter, which was long and written on three different kinds of paper.

"My dear Pam," wrote the old lady, "I was immensely relieved at hearing from you, though I took it for granted that you were all right, and though I think you might have written before. Do you know, viper, that it is over three months since you wrote to me? I am glad that poor little woman's baby has come home safely and that you have such a good nurse for her, though I still think you rather an idiot to have saddled yourself with her and her husband. However, that is your own affair. Yesterday I saw Jack Lensky at the Penges',—those steel-pills people. He is said to admire the second daughter, the one who married Lord Freddy Fane and divorced him after six months. She is certainly amazingly good-looking,—a little like you only a thousand times handsomer. He looks very well and says he's greatly enjoying the season which, mark you, *I believe*. It's not pique that makes him say it to me, your friend, as

it would be in the case of most men. He asked for your news, which I gave him. Lady Freddy is evidently taken with him, though she is a young woman of much dignity and does not go on in Alys Compton's way, which is a blessing. Alys, *on dit,* has filed a petition for divorce, which has its funny side!

"I last saw her at Dolly Hetley's wedding. Did I write you about that function? St. Peter's was packed and the incomparable Ratty looked really rather well in his uniform.

"Evelyn has been in Paris buying much pink finery. She wears only pink or white nowadays, which is wise of her. Henrietta is not well, but Marmy is much stronger and has a pony.

"James I saw last at the Academy last week. He has been ill, but bears his honours with dignity. Henny was very anxious for him to refuse the appointment and go back into active politics, but he wouldn't. This Chancellorship of course, brings him a very good income, but he is too young to live the life he does.

"Now my dear, write to me again and tell me your plans. I was very good about your scandalous behaviour to poor Lensky, and never scolded you at all, so I think I deserve your confidence. I have not told a single soul where you are, either. When are you coming back? I don't want to hurt your pride, but you really needn't stay away out of consideration for Jack's feelings. He seems to me to have entirely recovered. My dear love to you.

"Affectionately yours,

"Eliza Wight."

The baby slept, its small mulberry-coloured face tranquil. Pam put her letter back into its envelope, and sat for a long time without moving. "Lady Freddy Fane; Miss Penge of the Pills! I wonder whether he'll marry her," she thought. "I should like to see her. He can hardly like her for her resemblance to me—poor girl!—I wonder why he did care for me!"

For several minutes her thoughts ran on in the same strain, before she allowed herself to think of Peele's letter which lay, with one for Cyril Wantage, on the grass beside her.

"*He* might know," she reflected coldly, glancing at the envelope, "that there's no use in writing!"

Then moving a little to keep the child out of a suddenly arrived ray of sunlight, she went on to herself about Lensky. "How I wish he'd write to me! How I'd love to see him. Perhaps, if it's really true about Lady Freddy, he will write. He said we should always be friends—oh, if he should only come over the grass towards me this minute, how I should fly at him,—and probably drop and squash you, Miss," she finished aloud, to the unconscious baby.

Then, as a tall, slowly-moving woman appeared on the terrace and stood looking down into the grey shadows of the olives, Pam the Greater rose gingerly, and carried Pam the Less up the slope.

"*Eh angioletto! Eh agnellino!*" murmured the nurse, a placid-faced woman with gold hoop-earrings and a gay plaid gown, "I can see thee grow, my pretty! And you, Signor-

ina," she added, turning, "the Signora, *povera anima,* is awake and asking for you."

Pam nodded and pausing to pick from one of the mossy and broken urns that stood at the top of the steps she had just come up, a great handful of dark heliotrope, went quickly over the grass to the open drawing-room window.

CHAPTER II

MARY WANTAGE lay in her narrow bed in the corner of the brick-floored room, her fair hair cut close to her head, her hollow eyes only half open.

By her, on a table, stood some bottles, a clinical thermometer and a little ebony crucifix on a marble pedestal. The room was dusky and comparatively cool, but sweat stood on the sick woman's pallid face, and the Sister of Mercy by her was fanning her with a gay-coloured fan, a souvenir of the Casino at the foot of the hill.

"Where is—Cyril?"

"He's asleep, Mary dear. You know how worn out he was,"—Pam took the fan and the sister silently left the room.

"Where is the baby?"

"Just gone to dinner," returned Pam, cheerfully, fanning her as she spoke. "She's as good as an angel, and I've had her for the last hour. How you'll enjoy her when she's a little older."

Mary shook her head. "No," she said quietly, "no." After a moment she went on, looking at the girl, "Pam,—you know as well as I do."

"What do I know?"

"That I'm dying. And—I don't see why you won't acknowledge it! I'm not afraid. And I've known all along."

For a minute Pam looked at her, and then, laying down the fan, said gravely, "Have you, Mary?"

Mrs. Wantage gave a little smile of content.

"Thank you! Yes, I have. You see, I've always been so delicate,—and I shouldn't mind, except for *him* and *her*. And—who is to tell him?"

Pam had known for the last ten days that the poor little woman was dying, but she had been afraid to tell Wantage, whom the slightest hint about his wife's being in a dangerous condition threw into an almost hysterical condition as irritating, to the girl, as it was pitiful. Now, laying her hand on the sick woman's, she said quietly, "I think you must tell him. It is—his right."

"Oh, poor Cyril! Is it not sad for him? And just when he is doing so well, too. Well,—if you'll send him to me, I will tell him. But,—what about my poor little baby? *He* can't take care of her. If she were only a boy!"

The sunken eyes filled with tears.

Pam arose. "No,—he can't take care of her,—they would be in each other's way,—but—I'll take care of her, Mary."

"Oh—but—you'll marry some day. I *hope* you will, Pam, for you deserve to be happy."

Pam, even at that moment, had to bite her lip to suppress a smile. That this poor little thing out of whom the power to live had literally been starved, should identify happiness with matrimony!

Then, leaning over the bed and kissing Mary Wantage's damp cheek she said "No, I shall never marry. And—little

Pam shall be—my daughter. So do not trouble about her."

Then she went into Wantage's room where he lay fully dressed on his bed, one arm under his head, and gently waked him.

"Wake up, Cyril,—Mary wants you—Mary wants you."

"Then she must be better," he cried, springing up and rubbing his sleep-blurred eyes, "she *is* better, isn't she?" Then seeing her grave face he burst into a sob. "Oh, she isn't worse, you needn't try to frighten me——"

"Go to her, and try not to distress her. Try to be brave."

When she had seen the sick-room door close behind him she went to the end of the passage and into her own room.

From a drawer she took her battered old tin despatch box and opening it stood for a moment looking at the letters lying in it. There were three letters, all unopened, and all addressed by James Peele.

"He will surely soon stop writing if I never answer him," she told herself, an obstinate set to her lips, "and I would rather die than write."

Then adding to the pile of letters the one she had received an hour ago she locked the box, put it away, and sat down.

Two rooms away poor little Mary Wantage lay dying, and her husband was in genuine despair. Pam was deeply sorry for them both. She had, shortly after her flight to this long-deserted place, written to Wantage, on hearing that Mary was rapidly losing strength, to bring his wife to her; she had sent the money necessary for the journey, and,

glad of the occupation as well as full of compassion, devoted all her energies to the task of curing the sick woman.

Day after day she had sat by Mary, reading to her, sewing, in her clumsy way, for her, talking to her about the coming baby, building beautiful air-castles to amuse her. And while, underneath, her own wild pain and rebellion throbbed and tortured her, the girl spared no labour to render more durable the poor woman's dreary time of waiting. As unselfish as if Mary Wantage had been her own sister she had cared for and tended her, and then when night came, and she was alone, James Peele's image came back from his banishment and tortured her till dawn.

She loved the man, that she had owned bravely from the moment when he had kissed her in the Hall in her own house in London. It would, she felt, have been an absurdity to deny this to herself after telling it to Lensky, but she tried to counterbalance, and in a great measure succeeded in counterbalancing this avowal by her equally frank admission of the man's unworthiness to be loved. "I do not like, nor respect, nor admire him," she told herself, "I only love him."

And without faltering for so much as a second, she refused to face the possibility of ever again seeing him. Her plan was very simple. When a year had passed she would write and tell him that unless he would promise never to try to see her, she must consider herself banished from London. She would explain to him that while his physical presence exercised over her an invincible fascination, she was ashamed of the feeling, and would rather never again set foot in England than

run the risk of seeing him. And then, quite frankly she would throw herself on his mercy and beg him not to persecute her.

For six weeks after leaving home this plan had appeared to her a fully satisfactory one, and then—he had written, and every nerve in her body had quivered as she recognised his writing.

After a struggle that lasted a whole night she had conquered her desire to read the letter, but being unable to burn it, she had locked it into her old despatch box—in which years ago she had kept a note from him and a rose he had worn in his coat,—unopened.

In March another letter had come, and in early April another, both to meet with the same fate. And of course as she conquered, the girl grew stronger, and now the baby,—the baby that was, by such a strange turn of the wheel, to be hers,—was there to help her.

That poor little Mary was dying was sad; very sad for Mary herself and for Cyril, whose better nature was bound up in hers, but Pam loved neither of them with a very deep affection, though, having helped them, she was of course attached to them both, whereas the baby—it had been hers from the hour it was born, and she loved it. She had been hurt by Lensky's silence. She had not written to him, but he could have sent a letter to her house in Westminster, and she had longed for news with a sort of hurt loneliness that had lasted until the wee Pam had come. Ratty would have written, she knew, in the circumstances, and poor Charnley Burke, though in his own case he had written only when he was dying, would, had he parted from her as Lensky did,

have sent her flowers, or sweets, and a clumsily expressed plea for news.

But Lensky, as she knew from the Duchess and from the newspapers, was going about as usual, leading cotillons, driving in his little brown victoria, admiring handsome women, dining, wining, riding, exactly as if he had never known her. The Pam incident, she told herself with a little pang, was closed, and it had left him as it found him, cool, serene, delightful, interested in the daily round of work and amusement, enjoying life in his calm yet whole-hearted way.

And she, who in all her life before had never really longed for a friend, regretted this friendship that had after all been something else with a keenness that occasionally amounted to a positive passion of loneliness. So now, as she went to the nurse's room, it was of her lost friend and not of her lost love that she thought, for having resolutely refused to indulge in thoughts of that love it had at last gradually withdrawn from the centre of her mind, where it had at first stood ranting and mouthing like a selfish actor, and dwelt, always living, always suffering, in decent obscurity in the back of her consciousness. Contentedly aware that her struggle over each subsequent letter of Peele's was less than the preceding one, then, she thought with a little pang of Lensky, as she went down the passage. "It is hard to have lost my friend, too,—" she said.

But there on the nurse's lap lay the new, the brand-new Pam. A Pam whose life was to be so different from her god-mother's; a Pam who was to be taken care of, loved, without a rival; a Pam who was *not* "to know best."

CHAPTER III

A WEEK later Pam stood on the platform of the dingy black station of the white city at the foot of the hill by the sea. She had just said good-bye to Cyril Wantage, who had gone back to London, where the Lepidoptera Britannica was supposed to have greatly suffered by his prolonged absence.

Poor little Mary had been buried the day before, and Wantage, dazed and quiet after his first wild grief, was behaving better than Pam had ventured to hope.

He had left his baby without reluctance, glad to know the poor little creature was in good hands, and now Pam was alone with the child that, as she put it, had come to her by such roundabout ways.

Going back through the wicketed *sortie*, the girl turned to her left, and made her way through the dull walled street to the heart of the town, where she had some shopping to do. She must buy some wool of which Pilgrim, reluctant but adoring deputy-grandmother, was to fabricate socks for the baby; she must go to the library at which, years before, the Duchess had seen her name on a parcel of books, and thus quite by chance discovered her whereabouts; she must try on two frocks, and buy some chocolate.

As she walked, swinging along the slippery street at her usual rapid gait, her heart rose suddenly.

"Sursum corda," she said to herself, "but why? I *am*

sorry about poor little Mary, and that helpless duffer Cyril. I shall miss them both. Only—wee Pammy is mine, mine own tiny baby, and somehow God seems splendidly near to His world, this dark day!"

It was, though she did not try to analyse it, the natural reaction after the days of depression contingent on Mary Wantage's illness and death. The dead were gone, the living remained, and the beauty and poetry of the new life just beginning were helping to heal the wounds that the meeting with Peele had left gaping in her heart.

She must love James Peele until she died, and no doubt would not stop then, but now that she had a new, innocent healthy love to counterbalance that one of which she was so ashamed, hope itself had come back.

The woman who sold the pink and white wool was most sympathetic. "Poor lady," she said, as Pam critically studied two shades of delicate rose-colour, "it was very sad for her. And the baby, Mademoiselle?"

"The baby is *mine*. I am to keep her always. She is named for me."

"Really, Mademoiselle? Ah well, I remember Mademoiselle herself as a little child in a white furry coat. *Et la Maman de Mademoiselle fut d'une beauté éblouissante.* Might I ask how Madame finds herself?"

Pam flushed with pleasure. "I'll have this, please. And you remember my Mother, Madame Charrette? She is very well. They are living in Japan now."

Madame Charrette, who had a heavy moustache but a romantic heart, sighed deeply. *"En voilà un roman,"* she

replied, making up her parcel neatly. "A real passion of the most great."

Pam nodded and left the shop. The unconventionality of Madame Charrette's remarks did not strike her, for she felt somehow less lonely, knowing that this old woman remembered and admired her father and mother.

At the library she changed her last book for "Henry Ryecroft," and then crossing the street, climbed up three pairs of stairs and tried on the cheap little frocks to which her adoption of the Wantage family had reduced her.

When she came out again the scant rain had gathered strength and poured down in a heavy shower. Pam stood for a moment looking into it with some disgust, and then, having a letter to post, slipped along under the dripping awnings to the post-office.

As she dropped her letter to the Duchess into the box, she caught sight of a man bending over one of the high desks dedicated to the use of the writers of telegrams. He wore a long, dark rain-coat and a soft felt hat, but in spite of these more or less disguising properties she knew him at once. It was Lensky.

For a moment she stood staring at his unconscious back, and then, her face flushing with pleasure, started across the floor towards him. She had nearly reached him when a lady at the next desk turned and said to him, "Is it in Surrey, Mr. de Lensky?"

"No,—Kent," he answered, going on with his writing, and Pam, turning, hurried from the place without addressing him.

The tall girl in the beautifully cut coat and skirt was, she knew, Lady Freddy Fane. And he knew her, Pam's, address, and if he cared to break his long silence, could do so.

Through the rain she flew to the place where a small and not over-clean yellow omnibus stood waiting for the moment when it should start up Pam's hill towards the distant village whither almost all its passengers were bound.

Taking her seat, she reviewed the little scene she had just witnessed, Lensky's wet back bent over his telegram, the dark profile of the handsome girl beside him, and, in the background, hesitating, ridiculous, more than a little angry and hurt, Pam Yeoland, laden with bundles, staring at them.

Gradually the 'bus filled with chattering peasant women whose wet clothes smelt of dye, and with brown-faced men smoking atrocious cigars and discussing their affairs loudly with their neighbours. The door was closed and the vehicle began its lumbering progress.

"He *said* we were to be friends, and I ought to have trusted him and spoken. Oh, how I should have loved hearing him speak,—— 'You, Miss Yeoland!' he would have said, and he would have smiled. But he knows my address, and if he wants to see me he can easily do so. It is not my place to make advances. Oh, how that man smells of garlic!"

Half way up the hill it occurred to her that she might easily in such a conveyance, catch the germs of measles or scarlet-fever, and carry them home to the baby, so, suddenly terror-stricken, she jumped out into the rain and went her way on foot.

Lensky might have written to her, at least once, in all that time. His friendship must be very unlike her idea of that sentiment, or he would have done so. No doubt he was glad she had broken the engagement, particularly now he knew this handsome Lady Freddy.

Very wet, and thoroughly cross, though half-laughing at her own unreasonableness, Pam reached the Villa. An hour later, as, dry and happy, the baby in her lap, she sat in her shabby drawing-room, Pilgrim came in. "A telegram, Miss Pam."

Pam burst out laughing. "Pilly," she exclaimed, "I am the silliest goose in the world!"

Then she opened the wire and read:

"Am at Hotel Victoria with friends. May I come to see you?"

"J. DE LENSKY."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN de Lensky arrived, the following afternoon, he found a Pam in the best of spirits, attired, it is true, in a sober grey muslin frock, but with a yellow rose in the lace at her throat and a flexible silver belt round her waist. A Pam, in short, in both mental and physical gala attire.

She stood, for she had heard the coming of his cab, in the open door, her slight figure outlined against the cool dusk of the hall, the afternoon sun just touching her glossy plaits.

And when she saw him, a most immaculate and prosperous-looking Lamartine in grey clothes and one of the finest Panamas ever woven, her joy overflowed, and forgetting the short interlude of a different relationship that had interrupted their friendship, gave him both her hands and cried, her face quite rosy with pleasure, "Oh, I *am* so glad to see you!"

And he, as the cabman drove off to the shade in the lee of the house, smiled at her as, she thought, only he could smile and shook her hands warmly, not a shadow of *arrière-pensée* in his face or his manner. "And I am so glad to see you. And you look so well!"

"I am well. Come in out of the heat. The fatted calf is being prepared in the background, but no one ever heard of the prodigal himself ever being roasted, and the sun is awful to-day!"

She led him across the glossy brick floor into the high-

ceiled, scantily-furnished drawing-room. The blinds were all closed and the room filled with a luminous green dusk most refreshing after a long drive in an open cab. "Sit down, dear person, and be comfy. I hope the flowers don't smell too strong. I love them so, myself,——"

The room was full of bowls and vases and even earthenware pans of roses and heliotrope.

"They are delicious,—but why do you call me a Prodigal?" Lensky drew his chair nearer hers and polished his glass vigorously on a blue pocket-handkerchief which, she observed, exactly matched his striped shirt.

She laughed. Some slight misgivings that she had felt before his arrival had now quite gone, definitely disposed of by the happy serenity of his face.

"Because you prodigalled, didn't you? You never wrote me a word,—me, your friend!" It was so delicious to know that she need not choose nor measure her words. This dear, exquisite Lamartine wore no bleeding heart under his smart waistcoat and she could be as fond of him, in her own way, as she liked.

"But of course I didn't. If you had wanted me you would have let me know. Would you not?"

It was amazing how perfectly he fitted his present surroundings. At home in Huntley Street, at home in Evelyn's beautiful drawing-room, as much at home in Little Cowley Street as if he had been born there, here he was looking, in the shabby brick-floored Villa, as if he had never been out of it in his life. Pam wanted to tell him all this, but there were so many things she wanted to tell him!

"I almost wrote to you several times," she said, instead, "but—I didn't quite dare——"

"Why?" He watched her in the most satisfied way as he put his question, his glossy head bent as she had always pictured it in her thoughts of him.

"Well,—I don't know. Or rather——" For once it seemed she was a little embarrassed, remembering their last meeting.

Then he said, quite simply, "You were afraid of hurting me. You need not have been afraid of that."

"I know it now. And it was idiotic of me, but——" she could, however, hardly add that most men might, in the circumstances, have been hurt by a merely friendly letter from her, so she got up and rang the bell.

Lensky rose as she did, and as she sat down, resumed his seat. That he understood her thought she instinctively knew, and a glow of happiness in her possession of such an incomparable friend came to her face.

She was so glad to see him, so overjoyed in knowing that he was content with the love that she could, and did, give him, that she would have liked to shake his hand again, or pat his shoulder, to make him comprehend her happiness. He met her smile with one that was eloquent of all the sympathetic understanding in the world, and then Pilgrim came in and was told to bring tea.

"Well,—whichever of us was in fault, makes no difference. It shall never happen again, shall it? And now," she went on, "tell me what brought you here."

"Two things. The wish to see you, and the wish to be

with some friends,—the Penges. They came last week, and I joined them the day before yesterday. They are coming to call on you, if you'll allow them to."

"I shall love to know them. Lady Freddy Fane is with them, isn't she? I saw her yesterday."

"Yes. It is for her that I came. She is most beautiful, and a delightful woman; clever and kind as well as so handsome."

Pilgrim brought in tea and Pam lighted the lamp.

"How nice! How long are you to be here?"

"A week—but we go to Monte Carlo the day after to-morrow. Mrs. Penge wants to know if you would care to go with us? We shall stop the night, and have some music, besides gambling a little."

"Oh,—you still gamble?" The words burst from her involuntarily, and she paused, horror-stricken.

He looked at her gravely. "Yes. Why not?"

Then, before she had time to answer, he went on as she clashed a cup down on the tray, "There is a new opera being sung,—and some of the Paris opera people are singing, I hear, remarkably well. Will you come?"

Pam shook her head. "I can't."

"But why?"

"Because I can't leave the baby."

"The——" For the first time she saw Lensky look really amazed, and she burst out laughing. "Yes. I have adopted the child of a—a friend of mine who has just died. She is only three weeks old, and I should be afraid to leave her." She gave him a cup of tea and he sat stirring it for some time

without speaking. At last he said slowly, "I am very glad for you—about the child. When will you return to London?"

"I don't know. Please—let's not talk about that. Tell me about the winter and what you have been doing. How is Evelyn Chesney?"

"Very well now, I believe. I have not seen her for a long time. The Duchess is magnificent. Lady Alys is obliged to get rid of poor Bill."

"Poor Bill?"

"Yes. They are both of them to be pitied. He hasn't been sober for six months, I should say, which is not pleasant for her."

"No. Well,—my delectable cousin Ratty?"

"Maxse is the most domestic of—boys. He will never grow to be a man. He drives with his wife every afternoon. Can more be said? By the way, I met Miss Greene-with-an-E the other night,—at the Coliseum. She was—vastly cordial, and enquired most tenderly for you. When I told her I had not seen you since December, nor heard from you, she thought I lied. She was with a gentleman in mourning,—for my friend Mrs. Bingle is dead, and I think Miss Greene aspires to take her place."

For an hour they talked, and then, at Lensky's request, Pam fetched the baby. It was cooler now, and Pilgrim had opened one of the windows, through which one had a beautiful view of the sea. Lensky walked about the long room as he waited, and then, when she came back, the baby in her arms, he stood still, watching her approach. "She has just

waked up, so we may reasonably hope she will not bellow," the girl explained, smiling at the child. She did not look up, or she would have seen Lensky's colour change to a soft pink as he watched her, and his eyes look as they did when he heard music.

"Is she—big for her age?" he asked, gravely.

"I haven't the slightest idea!" They both laughed and he rattled his keys at the baby, which stared disdainfully at him.

"What is her name?" he inquired, as Pam sat down by the window.

"Pamela. I am her godmother, her poor little mother wanted to have it so. So now I am Old Pam, and she Pam Junior."

"I think she is going to have red hair." Gingerly he passed his forefinger over the scant fluff on the child's head, "And I don't like her nose."

"You are extremely rude, but we don't care a bit. I suppose you think your own nose was—beautiful—when you were three weeks old?"

He laughed. "No. The history of my nose is a family joke. Until I was ten or eleven it remained the most plebeian of buttons, round and flat, to my mother's despair. Then one day it began to grow, and it grew and grew until it nearly hid me, and my mother, I believe, used to burn candles to different saints to make it stop. By the way," he went on, his voice changing, "I have a letter for you from my mother. I—she insists on my giving it to you,—so I must."

"All right. She must have been—rather relieved, I should think."

He took the letter from his pocket and handed it to her, and as she read it she flushed a deep, uncomfortable red. The letter was short but indignant, but what caused the girl's blush was not the anger of this unknown old woman, but the realisation it brought home to her that de Lensky had cared far more than she had ever guessed.

"You must not be annoyed," he said, as she laid the letter on the table, "she adores me, you know, and—the old story of the tigress and her cub."

"I don't mind the tigress," answered Pam, "but—I am sorry that—the cub was—upset."

"She exaggerates that," he returned, calmly. "I wrote her only the bare facts, so that part is all pure assumption, but—well, you see, I talked to her about you when I was at home."

"Oh!" Pam looked at him, as she shifted the baby to another position. "I never thought to tell you, that evening, that I was sorry to—to hurt you,—I was so miserable myself and so selfish—and you were so quiet, I didn't think you cared much. If you did, I am really awfully sorry."

He smiled, apparently a little amused by her choice of words. "Don't be awfully sorry, dear lady! I assure you that even then I was much more distressed for you than for myself. I have my own theory of life, you know, and regretting the inevitable doesn't happen to be part of it."

She drew a deep sigh of relief. "I know,—and of course the minute I saw you to-day I knew it was all right. But—

I was very selfish not to think then,—last winter,—of you. However, *Tutto va bene chi si finis ce bene,*—isn't it, Miss Wantage?"

But at this point Miss Wantage, disregarding the presence of a stranger, began to burble and then to roar, and had to be removed.

CHAPTER V

"LE jeu est fait,—rien ne va pl-u-u-s!"

The croupiers drawled their formulas, ancient hags clawed in their or other people's winnings, beautiful young women invited strange men, in sirenic tones, to lend them a louis d'or, respectable matrons looked disdainfully down their noses at the shocking scene to see which they had come hundreds of miles. Scraps of all civilised tongues filled the air, oaths, laughs, groans. And the air itself, thick with a thousand scents from Peau d'Espange beloved of unmentionable Parisian ladies up to the most delicate essence of Houbigant or Guerlain was unbearably hot, unbearably sweet, and curiously exciting.

Pam and Mr. Penge, inventor of the celebrated Steel Pills, a thin, rather aristocratic-looking old man with dyed eyebrows and snowy hair, had wandered away from the table where Lensky and Lady Freddy Fane had paused, and gone into a Rouge-et-Noir room.

They had come, in spite of the baby, the day before, and were to remain until the next morning, and Pam was enjoying herself in a way that surprised her.

Papa Penge was a curiously pompous, yet intelligent old man, Mamma Penge less intelligent as she was less pompous, but the kind of plump old lady whose good-nature acts as a buffer for her family against all outside slings and arrows, and uncomfortable thoughts died in her cosy presence in a

quite extraordinary way. Whereas the two daughters, Miss Penge, or Buzzy, as she was called, and the lovely Lady Freddy were both extremely nice women who, taking a lively fancy to the lonely girl, made her feel almost at once as though she had known them for years.

It was, too, a delight to Pam to see that while de Lensky hovered in tranquil adoration about Lady Freddy, he still turned at certain moments always to her,—to Pam.

"If only they would marry, and then both take me for their best friend," she thought.

Standing in the crowd, studying the faces opposite her, the idea came back to her. Yes, if she could keep Lensky always for her friend, and gain for a new one this sincere, intelligent sympathetic Dorothy Fane, how happy she should be.

Presently the two people of whom she was thinking came to the same table and sat opposite her. Lady Freddy wore black, and round her throat gleamed a single string of pearls. She was really like Pam in a curious elusive way. It was possibly more an expression than anything else, but it was undeniable, and Pam smiled as she studied it. Lensky, after standing for a few minutes looking on at the game, reached over and placed some gold-pieces on the table. He won, pushed back the original sum with his winnings, and won again.

For five minutes this went on, until the attention of the motley bystanders was fixed on him. Lady Freddy said something to him, but he did not hear, and then, once more risking the whole of the considerable sum of money, he won again.

A woman in front of him rose and with a glance of superstitious awe offered him her seat. He turned, stared absently at her and apparently remembering that he was not alone, refused her offer with a courteous bow. A moment later Lady Freddy and he had joined Pam and Mr. Penge.

Pam looked curiously at Lensky. His face wore an expression she had never seen on it; one of concentrated excitement strongly held in check, and he was extremely pale. And although the girl had never before seen that look in any face whose changes were familiar to her, she at once recognised it, and knew that his passion for play was roused.

As she was intently studying him he looked up and met her gaze. He smiled. "Will you come for a turn round the rooms with me, Miss Yeoland?" he asked, and as soon as they were out of earshot of the others, he added, "Yes, you were right."

"Right?"

"In thinking that I have a fit of the gambling fever to-night."

"But—are you going to do it?"

"Yes," he answered, very gravely, "I think so,—when you all have gone to the hotel. I should be lucky to-night."

"And then you'd try again to-morrow,—and be unlucky."

"Very likely." He looked at her a little anxiously, and with a smile she said, as they drew near to a Roulette table, "You needn't be afraid. I am not going to ask you not to!"

He laughed, showing his teeth, as he so rarely did. "I am glad! But how did you know I thought you were?"

"I—just knew. And I may as well warn you that I think

Lady Freddy is going to be less discreet than I, so if you want to spend a merry evening losing money, you had better avoid her!"

"I should refuse if she asked me. I say,—look at that chap with the hair like a shoe-brush, he's winning a pot of money——"

Pam did not ask what Lensky would have done if she had begged him not to gamble that night, and stood silent for a long time, while he watched the man with the shoe-brush hair on whose shoulder the bird of luck had evidently perched.

To the girl's left an Englishman stood talking to a very pretty Frenchwoman obviously not his wife.

"*Mais non,*" he was saying, looking down at her, "*il n'est pas temps.*"

"But just for a moment," she pleaded, shaking a netted gold bag full of loose coin, "*j' suis en veine ce soir, j'l'sais. Allons, petit chèri, fais moi place!*"

But the big man refused to let her try the luck she felt to be hers, and she turned away sulkily. Pam watched them, much amused. The man was evidently a pillar of society on a holiday; she could mentally picture him at home in the country, chained to the domestic hearth, shooting over his turnips, ornamenting the little church with his exemplary presence on Sunday mornings. His wife was probably about forty-five, possessed of a weather-beaten complexion and all the virtues. Yet here he was with a scrap of humanity from Montmartre or Batignolles, aged about twenty-three, chiefly noticeable for the candour of her brow and the freedom of

her tongue, and who undoubtedly could, if she thought it desirable, kick off his hat on a moment's notice.

Pam stood quite still, enjoying the conversation carried on by these two people, and then, suddenly, her smile faded and a look very much like terror darkened her eyes. For the big man, in the middle of a laborious explanation to his companion in what he considered French, broke off and muttered to himself under his breath, but so that Pam heard the words as clearly as if they had been shouted, "Good Lord, Jim Peele!"

Taking Mademoiselle Fernande by an elbow, he wheeled round and made for the lobby door. Pam stood still for a second, and then caught de Lensky's arm.

"Come," she said, and without a word of explanation led him out of the Casino, following closely on the heels of the Englishman and his companion.

Lensky, when they stood in the cool night air on the steps, turned to her. "You were faint?" he asked.

She dropped his arm. "No,—but—someone is there whom I don't want to see."

He leaned towards her and studied her face for a moment in silence and then, taking her hand and laying it on his arm, led the way to the garden, where he made her sit down on a bench, and taking out his cigarette-case asked her if he might smoke.

She nodded, for she could not speak. Peele, judging by the big Englishman's proceedings, must have been just opposite them at the table; if she had raised her eyes she would have seen him; it was by the merest chance that he had not

seen her. What was he doing here? Was he going to try to gain admittance to the Villa? Had her silence so angered him that he had decided to take matters into his own hands and force things to go his way? These and hundreds of other thoughts whirled through the girl's mind as she sat there under the brilliant stars.

Had she been foolish not to answer his letters?

He was not the man to accept the purely passive role she in her arrogance of strength had assigned to him. Tired of waiting, he had made up his mind to act. She turned and looked at Lensky's placid profile as he sat smoking, his near-sighted gaze fixed on the sea.

"Mr. de Lensky!" At the desperation in her voice he started.

"Yes?"

"It is—*he*—of whom I told you, who is in there. I heard someone say so. And—I don't know what to do."

"You don't want to see him?"

"No! And yet——" He could see her painful blush, and looked away in pity. "When I think that he is in there,—oh, I must go home. I must go at once. If he should come out here——"

"He will not come here; and if he did——"

She burst into a harsh laugh. "Oh, but you don't understand! If he came, if I saw him, I—I should do anything he said, to-night. I—I want him so!"

Lensky did not move. "You would do—exactly what you think—wisest," he returned, hesitating a little on the last word, and evidently using it deliberately, instead of

"right." "You are nervous, just now, but—you are strong, and you would certainly not—make a fool of yourself."

The roughness of his phrase acted like a tonic on her.

"No,—of course I shouldn't," she answered, humbly; "but—it would make things almost unbearable. Seeing him, I mean. I—I can't tell you the effect his face has on me. And I *am* afraid to see him. I am so sorry to—to be such a bore, but—will you take me to the station? I can catch the 10.15 train. I—I *can't* stay on here."

To her infinite relief he rose at once, throwing away his cigarette. "Of course you can't. Yes,—you can easily make that train, and I'll explain to Mrs. Penge. If we hurry we can go to the hotel for your luggage."

But this Pam would not do. She was extremely nervous and absolutely refused to go to the hotel, or to leave the garden.

"Lady Freddy's maid will pack my things to-morrow. I shall be at home by midnight. What—what will you tell Mrs. Penge?"

Lensky reflected for a moment. "I shall just say that you found it necessary to go home suddenly," he returned. "And when you see them on Friday you can do as you like."

A few minutes later Pam was in the train, and Lensky stood bareheaded before her. "I am wiring Pilgrim to meet you," he said, "and on Thursday I shall come to see you. I think you had perhaps better tell me about it." Pam took his hand in both hers. "Yes,—I will. And you will tell me what to do. And—thank you."

"Good-bye, then, until Thursday."

As the train moved away, he stood looking after her, his hat in his hand, the strong light pouring down on him showing him distinctly, even to the small pearls in his shirt, and the gardenia in his coat; correct, impassive, almost statuesque, on a small scale.

CHAPTER VI

"I AM awfully ashamed to have been so—idiotic, I can't imagine what made me!"

Lensky smiled. "Love often makes people afraid," he returned, in a serious voice.

They sat in the drawing-room of the Villa beside a shabby little inlaid table on which stood, still locked, the despatch-box containing Peele's letters to Pam. It was a wet day, and in the silence ensuing on his unusually intimate speech, the sound of the rain beating on the windows seemed to grow louder, and then diminish, like a pulsing thing.

"It is,—*that*—I suppose," the girl said, slowly, clasping her hands; "but—it isn't a *good*—love. I can't express it, but I know, myself. It is like—being possessed of a devil."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean——" She was always inarticulate under stress of strong emotion, and spoke in a painfully fragmentary way as he sat looking out into the rain,—"I mean that a real, *whole* love is a good thing, and that this—isn't."

"Because he is married?"

Her face trembled and then broke into a smile as she looked round the room in which her father and mother had so often sat, almost as if apologising to it for his mistake.

"Good Heavens, no! That makes no difference in the—the quality of the feeling. I mean—well, my mother loves my father with real love, and it is good; it always was

good, even when it was wrong. But I—I don't respect—this man,—or like him, and I am ashamed of the way he makes me feel. But when he is near—then I feel as if I had wings that were—beating the air with impatience to carry me to him. And I give you my word, when I shut my eyes I can see him as plainly as I see you this moment. And when I got his note this morning, begging me to see him,—if you hadn't been coming I'd have—bolted."

Lensky turned and looked at her, for the first time for several minutes. "And his other letters are in that box?"

"Yes. I—I wouldn't read them, but I simply could not make up my mind to burn them. Are you," she went on, unlocking the box and taking out the letters, "quite sure that I ought to read them?"

"Yes. It seems to me that you can't know how to act until you know what his intentions are,—and have been. And, besides, it is so much simpler to face matters."

She nodded. His cool common-sense was already doing her good. "Very well. I—I will read them and tell you what he says."

Lensky took his glass from his eye, and leaning back in his chair, to all intents and purposes as unable to see her face as if she had been in the next room, waited.

As she read the first letter she paled, and her hand shook. It was only a note, and she read it twice and then paused before she spoke.

"It is a very nice note," she faltered. "He—begs my pardon for—for coming to my house—and—he wants me to forget it, and—be friends."

"Not an original idea. And—the next?"

But the second letter, postmarked March 5th, was very long, and ten minutes had passed before Pam spoke. The rain beat on the windows, a door slammed somewhere in the distance, the clock on the mantelpiece struck four. The room, to Lensky, was as blurred and vague as some room in a dream, and Pam, as, involuntarily he at length turned to her, a mere mass of light blue or grey with a dark head and a white, featureless face.

"I—can't read you this. It—is only for me."

There was a long pause, after which he said, briskly, "Of course; but—the general purport? What did he mean to do when he wrote it?"

"He—I had not written, and he was——"

"Desperate?"

"Yes."

"I see. He insisted on seeing you; he didn't care—a tinker's curse,—what happened, but see you he must. Is that right?"

"Yes. He was—unhappy, too." In spite of herself there was a note of triumph in her voice, and fitting his glass to his eye with great celerity, Lensky looked at her, a frown breaking the smooth line of his almost white eyebrows. "Unhappy? Of course he was, poor brute. But—don't let that bias you. And remember, it was written nearly three months ago."

Pam did not answer, but in silence tore open the third letter. It was short.

"This was written the third of April, and—he was very

angry. He says 'I shall never again write to you, so you need not veil your proceedings in the mystery you evidently love——'"

"Aha! That's better. Is that the last?"

She shook her head. "No. There's—the one I received last week——"

"Oh. Well,—what does *it* say?"

Lensky's voice was conspicuously cheery and matter-of-fact, but as the girl opened the last letter he took his glass once more from his eye, and she, noting the movement, understood it.

Peele had written from London,—from the Green Street house where she had been. He had just seen the Duchess and learned from her that Pam was at the Villa.

"So you are in Arcadia?" he began, abruptly. "Alone in Arcadia. Do you not think that you have been rather unnecessarily hard on me? I behaved badly, I have admitted it, and begged your pardon, but you are too clear-headed to be fed with sophistries, so I will not pretend things to you. I love you, and you love me, so why not admit it? I have never loved another woman, you have never loved another man. And we both of us knew these things the minute I came into that dark room at the Duchess's that day in December. Therefore, why not admit and face the truth?

"Your silence refuses my offer of friendship, and I am sorry, for I am no weakling, and I could have kept the pact, if you had consented to make it, and I should never have

uttered a word to remind you of—Arcadia. Why were you so unwise?

"Of your engagement I have nothing more to say. It was a mistake, and when you knew that it was, you broke it. Your engagement to me nothing can break, not even death.

"Ah, my dear, I have no base intentions, nor even any high-flown, romantic ones. I cannot marry you, and I would rather die than injure you in any way. Come back and lead the life circumstances have planned for you, and meet me when chance wills it, without melodrama, without evasion.

"I give you my word never to force myself on you, and surely you are now old enough to know the value of compromise. I beg you once more, forgive the time when I have failed you, and give me one more chance. And remember 'the night we stormed Valhalla, a thousand years ago.'

"JAMES PEELE."

Pam read to the end, and then without a word handed the letter to Lensky.

As he read he frowned and his mouth grew a little set, but he did not speak. Pam knew already what the answer must be. She must refuse to see Peele under any and all conditions, and if he could not be brought to agree to her ultimatum she must let her London house and disappear somewhere with the baby and Pilgrim. She was amazed at the force of the passion the very sound of his voice had raised in her, and had, as she read, resolved to do anything

in the world rather than subject herself to the supreme temptation of seeing him.

"I will take the baby and go to—Russia,—anywhere," she was telling herself, when Lensky broke into an exclamation.

"Peele! James Peele! Not the Duchess's son-in-law?"

"Yes," answered the girl, flushing scarlet.

"But—James Peele,—the new Chancellor of some Duchy or other!"

His face, bent closer to hers, was full of the utmost amazement. "It is he!"

Pam shrugged her shoulders, a little annoyed by his surprise.

"It is. Is it so incomprehensible? I didn't mean to tell you, but I forgot the signature——"

Lensky rose and walked to the window and back before he answered her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, handing her the letter, "but—I never dreamed of him. He—in the first place he is so much older than you. However, that is not the question. The question is—how are you going to answer this? It is a—a clever letter."

"Yes. But it's—a lie," declared Pam, bluntly. "We neither of us could 'be friends.' I shall write and tell him that and—beg him to stop writing. And I shall tell him that unless he promises not to bother me I shall leave London."

Lensky came closer to her and studied her face for a moment with grave concentration.

"Yes. That is right. You have his Monte Carlo address?"

"Hôtel de Paris."

"There's one thing to consider, however. Accidental meetings."

Pam nodded, slowly. "I'll run that risk if he promises to let me alone. The Duchess knows I don't want to meet him, and—I shall go out very little. There's—the baby, you know."

"Yes, there's the baby," he answered, with great gentleness, "and I am very glad for you. You are a very good woman, Pam."

She stared. "I! Oh, no, I'm not; but I'm glad you think I am—Jack dear. It has helped me, to talk it over with you,—and—to read the letters with you. I am a fearful coward in some ways." The clock struck five and a cab came down the avenue. It was Lensky's cab, and she knew that he had an engagement and must go.

She took his hand. "I'll not keep you," she said, as he glanced with an apology at his watch, "but—I am grateful to you. You don't know what your friendship is to me, nor how much you—help me. I'll write to him to-night, and let you know what he answers. Good-bye, *amico*."

He smiled. "*Addio—amica cara.* Now if I were you I'd go and play with the baby for awhile!"

And when he had gone, his cab leaving gleaming streaks in the soaked gravel, she took his advice.

"Cassandra," she said, to the nurse, "I believe she's going to be white after all!"

CHAPTER VII

"I LOVE the way," remarked Sidney Blythe, feeding a bit of sugar soaked in coffee to a very elongated Scottish terrier, "the airy way in which you all talk about Miss Yeoland and her baby! And what—don't lick my fingers, you little brute,—my enquiring mind clamours to know is, if the lady is Miss Yeoland, why she has a baby; or, if she has a baby, why she is Miss Yeoland."

"Shut up, Sid," laughed Buzzy Penge, who was sitting on the grass near the tea-table, "you are improper."

"I am not! I am the only truly moral man in England, and I object to the constant references to this Miss Yeoland and her baby. I feel that she is a person I ought not to meet."

Lady Freddy, who was trying to read, looked up from her book. "Idiot! Why don't you go for a walk, Sidney? Buzzy, do get rid of him."

But Buzzy shook her head. "No use trying to do that; haven't I been trying for years? Good gracious, Dorothy, here comes Pam this minute!"

Pam advanced rapidly over the velvety lawn, waving her hand as she came, and Blythe put his hat on his perfectly bald head,—his way of preparing to meet strangers.

Buzzy Penge kissed Pam affectionately, Lady Freddy smiled at her, and then Blythe was presented. "Mr. Blythe. of whom you have heard."

Pam shook hands with him and sat down, taking off her hat and dropping it beside her on the grass.

"Guess the news," she exclaimed.

Blythe stared solemnly at her. "The baby has a tooth!"

"How *did* you know? One is *really* coming, though it's only a hump as yet!"

Everyone laughed. They had grown to be very good friends of Pam's, the Pill people, and Bumblemouth being only a half-hour's walk from Hinchingly, she had seen a great deal of them since her arrival three months before.

She knew that they, too, liked her, and the unceremonious intercourse with them had made the summer very pleasant for her. As they talked, that September afternoon, she watched Blythe with much interest, and suddenly, catching her eye, he asked her, taking off his hat and leaning against a tree, "Do you think she'll take me in the end?"

"Take you——"

"Yes. Buzzy,—Patricia, if you prefer her real name. You know all about it, so you might as well tell me your opinion."

Pam laughed. "If I did know I certainly shouldn't tell you."

"That's very unkind of you. I say, Buzzy,—do you think you will?"

"Seventeen," returned Miss Penge, quietly. "Go away, Sid, I can't bear you another second."

He rose, laughed, and strolled away towards the house, his hands in his pockets.

"Well?" asked Buzzy.

"I never saw such long eyelashes in my life," returned Pam, promptly.

"I told you so! And a year and a half ago, before he went to South Africa, he had nice curly hair and no more lashes than anybody else!"

"Was it fever?"

"Yes. And he's tried everything under the sun to make his hair grow, as I told you, and the only result is to encourage these outrageous lashes,—it's *too* awful!"

"Has he tried Chlorodyne,—no, Capsuloids?" inquired Pam, devoting her whole mind to the question.

"*Everything*. And he used to be so good-looking!"

Miss Penge's voice was sincerely mournful as she gazed after the diminishing figure of her swain.

Lady Freddy laid down her book. "I am very sorry for Sid," she observed, rising, "and I think you ought to make up your mind, Buzzy."

Then she, too, left the three beeches under which the tea-table stood, and the girls were alone.

"Why don't you make up your mind?" asked Pam, sensibly, nibbling a lump of sugar.

"My dear girl, can't you see? Could you marry a man without a hair on his head?" Miss Penge laughed as she spoke, but her eyes were serious. "If I had accepted him before he went to Africa I would of course have married him whatever happened, but as it happened I refused him two days before he sailed, and when I saw him on his return—*wasn't* I glad I had!"

"And now?"

"And now—he asks me two or three times a week, and I always refuse him. If," she added, ruefully, "it would only grow a little!"

"Can't you fix your mind on his eyelashes? They really are superb."

"No, I can't. As long as he keeps his hat on I have hopes.—and then he takes it off and I could scream with laughter. Such a sight I never saw,—exactly like a huge billiard-ball."

Pam nodded. "Poor you! Dorothy doesn't seem to mind it."

"He doesn't want to marry Dorothy," rejoined Lady Freddy's sister, drily. "But,—by the way, Pam,—Jack de Lensky is coming down to-morrow."

"*Is* he! I *am* glad."

"So am I. He's a dear. And I tell you what I think. I think he is falling in love with her."

"Do you?"

"Yes. You weren't here when he came in July, but I was, and—I'm fairly sure. It would be such a good thing for her."

"And for him."

"Oh, yes, there's no one quite like her. I've been rather hoping ever since we were on the Riviera, but they are both such reserved creatures, I couldn't come to any conclusion. Now, however,—I mean in July, he was absolutely devoted to her, and she was more like her old self than she has been since—since the divorce."

Pam was silent for a moment, and then said, thoughtfully,

"I hope you're right; it would be perfect. Only—he has a way of looking frantically devoted to any woman he finds attractive. There was my cousin Evelyn Chesney, for example. The Duchess of Wight thought he was sure to propose to her, and he didn't. What did he do—lean over her and worshipfully admire?"

"No. I know *that* trick of his, but this was different. They used to walk away from everybody and sit and talk, and forget to come back, and they used to ride together every morning,—and you know how careful he is, always. Even Mamma thought there was something in it, and you know Mamma!"

"Oh, Buzzy, it *would* be glorious! Do you know, I thought of it the day I met you, and hoped it might happen. I love Dorothy," she added, simply, "and Jack is the best friend I have in the world, so you can imagine how glad I should be. When is he coming?"

"To-morrow afternoon. Come and dine and sleep, and we'll see if we can't do a little match-making, will you?"

"I will," answered Pam, rising, "who else is coming?"

"Nobody who counts. Have you heard from the Incubus?"

"Yes,—but I won't have you call him that. He's doing very well, poor boy, and is coming down on Sunday to see the baby. He *will* be surprised about the tooth, won't he?"

Buzzy laughed.

"Well, I don't know? Did he expect it to remain toothless?"

"Nonsense! But she's only four months old, which is

awfully young for a tooth,—not that it is a tooth yet, but it won't be long."

Miss Penge burst out laughing, and then as suddenly was serious. "That vacuum system seems to be based on a sound principle,—a kind of massage, you know. It *might* make it grow."

Pam stared. "But it's growing perfectly all right, Cassandra says——"

Buzzy coloured vividly. "I wasn't thinking about your everlasting baby; I was thinking about Sid's hair."

"Well,—I must be off, but before I go I can tell you one thing, Patricia Penge. You're in love with that youth, hair or no hair."

"I'm not!"

"You lie; you are. And if you don't soon make up your mind to tell him so, *I* shall,—when he confides in me."

"Why do you think he's going to confide in you? He talks as he did this afternoon to *everybody;* it's his way."

Miss Penge had in reality no more teeth than other people, but the width of her mouth and her unrestrained smiles gave her a delusive air of possessing at least a dozen more than she had.

Pam smiled back at her, an equally good-natured smile, but on a smaller scale. "I don't mean that. He is going to seriously confide in me," she answered after a pause, "I saw it in his eye. And I shall enjoy it, I always do. I think I'll invite Dorothy to do a little match-making with me for *your* benefit!"

"Poor old Dolly,—she is never particularly inclined for

that sort of thing, her own experience was not encouraging. You never met Freddy, did you?"

"No."

"Awful, *unmitigated* rotter. Large, hearty-looking man, full of the meanest and smallest vices."

"Poor girl!"

"Yes, it was hard luck. So you see, joking aside, if she *could* be persuaded to marry Jack, we should all be tremendously glad."

At the lodge-gate Miss Penge turned back, and Pam sped homewards, her head full of heterogeneous but almost equally interesting ideas.

Jack and Dorothy! It would be really ideal, she thought, watching the quiet sea, and how glad she should be to see him the next evening.

CHAPTER VIII

HINCHINGLY was a hideous, most comfortable modern red brick mansion that had been built by Mr. Penge fifteen years before. Standing in a hollow near the sea, in a small but well-wooded park, it was cool in summer and warm in winter and the whole family loved it, as they were given to love their own possessions, extravagantly.

Even the horrible black and white marble hall was, they agreed, original and rather distinguished, and as, while admiring its monstrous ugliness, they tacitly covered as much of it as was possible with rugs and dull-hued tapestries, it might have been worse.

And, though the drawing-room was upholstered—there are some rooms to express the furnishing of which upholstered is the only word—in yellow satin, there was an alabaster vase on the Parian marble table in the centre, there was a mosaic table, gilt chairs and oil paintings of the Alps on the walls.

It was a hideous room, old-fashioned and inartistic and unbecoming to everyone who entered it, but neither of the Penge girls had ever made an effort to persuade their mother to change it.

To her it represented the final crystallisation of a long-cherished ideal. All during her youth she had longed for such a drawing-room, and when, fifteen years before, she had been able to compass it, her joy was so delightful, her pride

so innocently obvious that Buzzy, then a leggy, plain child of fifteen, had said to the twelve-year old Dorothy who protested against the yellow curtains, "I say, Dolly, *she* likes it, and it's hers, so let's just grin and bear it, shall we?"

And therefore, while little by little the rest of the house was moulded and beautified by their educated tastes, these two old-fashioned daughters had never so much as hinted to their mother that some slight changes might improve the room she so admired, and when in the course of time the curtains and chair-coverings had to be renewed, Lady Freddy herself helped the old lady to choose new satin of the same flamboyant shade for them, so that the glory of the apartment never diminished.

"Don't put on a pink frock," warned Miss Penge, poking her curly black head in at Pam's door, the evening after their talk about Lensky and Lady Freddy; "The Room objects to any colour except white and black, (which I believe aren't colours at all), but it positively shrieks at pink!"

Pam, who was sitting half-dressed by the dressing-table while Pilgrim put on her stockings, laughed.

"I know. I am wearing black. Dorothy is going to wear white, isn't she?"

"Yes. I'm to be black, too, only I'm spangly."

"I'm just plain black. Has Jack come?"

Miss Penge came in and closed the door. "Yes. He and Umslopagaas are smoking together."

"Um——"

"Sid. Before his hair all came out, he used to call himself that. Some old Greek or Roman, Umslopagaas was, I

believe: 'He was peaked as to his head, and sparse woolly hair grew upon it.' I wish sparse woolly hair grew upon it now,—not that it's peaked," she added dismally, "and the awful roundness seems to make it all the more absurd——"

Pam laughed. "*Du liebst ihn doch,*" she returned with an atrocious accent, glancing at Pilgrim, "and as I feel a pricking in my thumbs I know that I shall shortly be constrained to tell him so!"

When she opened the door of The Room, half-an-hour later, she stood still for a moment, wondering if there was time for her to turn back unobserved.

Lady Freddy, whose brilliant colouring not even her gleaming yellow surroundings could quite quench, was at the piano, under a lamp, her white skirts billowing softly round her, and beside her, his face not more than four inches from hers, sat Lensky, worshipping. His smooth head, almost white in contrast to the prevailing shade of the room, was bent in an attitude of adoration, and his hands were folded as if in prayer.

Lady Freddy, hearing the opening of the door, turned, but for a long moment he did not change his attitude, so that when he did look round, Pam was laughing.

"How d'you do? I *am* glad!" he cried, springing to his feet and coming towards her. "And how well you look."

"You don't look well," she returned, without ceremony, studying his face intently, "been ill?"

Lady Freddy rose. "He's been gambling, Pam," she said, with a frown of vexation on her dark brows, "and I've been scolding him."

Mrs. Penge just then hurrying in, Pam had a chance of a word aside with Dorothy.

"I say, Dolly,—*ask* him not to," she suggested, remembering that the summer before when he had wanted to marry her he had said that he would never again touch a card.

"He wouldn't stop because I wanted him to," answered Lady Freddy, as she turned to speak to a newly arrived guest, and Pam's thin shoulders crept despondently up towards her ears in the shrug she had learnt as a child.

"The moment appears to have arrived," she reflected, "for me to explain these two souls to each other."

But her lot at dinner was not Lensky, but the bald-headed Mr. Blythe. "I say, Miss Yeoland," he began, as they sat down, "how's your baby?"

"Quite well, thanks," answered Pam, innocently, "and she is really beginning to look like a human being at last; she smiles and her eyes are blue, and her hair——"

Conscience-smitten she broke off short, and then, meeting his gaze, shaded by his abnormal lashes, burst out laughing. "I *am* so sorry," she said, "but you don't mind, do you?"

"Not a bit. But you know, when all's said and done, the joke has its serious side. I'm awfully keen on Buzzy, and of course the poor girl can't marry a man with not one blade of hair on his head!"

"Why don't you try wigs? Graduated ones—scant, richer, then ambrosial?"

"As if anyone could fool old Buzzy!"

"That's true. You think she'd marry you if—it would grow?"

Mr. Blythe set down his wine-glass. "Oh, yes," he returned, confidentially, "she's awfully in love with me, you know; always was. She proposed to me when she was eleven and I refused her because her legs were so thin."

"Then why don't you *bully* her? Men are so silly," pursued Pam, softly, "to be so patient with women. Patience and fidelity are the vices of the age, I think."

"H'm! Dorothy doesn't think so."

"Doesn't she?"

"No, poor girl. I say, do you like our friend the Pole-Star?"

"I do. Immensely. Don't you?"

"Only know him a little. He used to be a friend of Fane's, so of course none of the Penges knew him, until Dolly met him again last winter and they got to be such pals. He has a good eye——"

"Two," corrected Pam, watching Lensky as he talked to Lady Freddy.

"Two, then. And they seem fairly contented to spend their time gazing at Dolly, don't they? Uncle Oliver—he's not my uncle, but one of my aunts married his brother—would be glad if it came off, I imagine. The divorce was a great blow to Uncle Oliver. Only your bloods take to that most useful institution, don't you think? He hates having people know about it, though it certainly wasn't *her* fault. Awful rotter, Freddy, poor chap, and we were all so fond of him."

"What a communicative person you are, Mr. Blythe," Pam remarked, "tell me more."

"I've told you all I know."

She shook her head. "Not you." Then she turned to her other neighbour, an old gentleman who, having heard Blythe's question about the baby, opened fire by enquiring civilly for her husband.

When dinner was over, Lady Freddy came up to Pam and took her arm. "Come out on the lawn, dear," she said, "I want to talk to you."

It was a beautiful night, warm and still, and softly lighted by a huge golden moon, and the two women crossed the lawn to where an ancient fountain, brought piece-meal from a villa near Florence, flung into the air from pipes played by fat-bellied little mediæval boys, three slender streams of silvered water.

"I always feel so sorry for those poor little banished Tuscans," Pam said, as they sat down on a stone bench, "I know they are homesick and hate your father for bringing them to this cold climate. The least you could do would be to provide them with Jaeger flannels for the winter."

Lady Freddy was silent for a moment, her beautiful dark face turned away. Then she answered slowly, "I was sitting by this fountain—near Fiesole—when Freddy asked me to marry him."

Pam said nothing, but laid a sympathetic hand on Dorothy's.

"Father always wonders why I sit here so much, but—oh, Pam, did you ever see him?"

"No, Dolly dear."

"But—you know how badly he behaved,—how I had

to divorce him,—well——" again she paused and Pam shivered involuntarily. "Well,—you and Buzzy have been talking about Jack Lensky, I know; haven't you? And rather hoping I'd marry him? So now I'm going to tell you something I can't tell Buzzy; it would make her too wretched, but you can—put the other idea out of her head. I divorced Freddy because I despised him, and because I'd have lost all self-respect if I had kept on living with him. But—it wasn't that I didn't—care for him."

"Oh, Dolly!"

"Yes,—'Oh, Dolly!' And of course you, with your idealising and your own different character will despise me for it, and never be able to understand," went on Lady Freddy, rapidly, "but now that I've told you this much I'm going to tell you more. He's a rake, and a liar, and a gambler,—a creature to be despised, and I despise him, but—I also love him."

There was a long pause, during which Pam's face grew slowly white. Dorothy thought that she could not understand!

"I love him, I tell you, bad as he is, and—if I saw him coming over the grass now, and he wanted me—nothing on earth could hold me!"

"Yes it could," answered Pam, hoarsely. "I couldn't, nor your family, but—you wouldn't go."

Lady Freddy rose. "Wouldn't I! Ah, my dear child, I was a fool to tell you, but—now you can put the idea of Jack Lensky out of Buzzy's head. And—I don't ask you not to tell."

She started towards the house, her head held high. "Luckily,—he doesn't want me. I bored him. Jack knew him,—sees him even yet sometimes, and that's one reason why I like him—Jack—so much."

"But—what if—Jack thinks—that he has some chance with you"—suggested Pam, with a pang of pity for Lensky, whom Fate seemed about to play such a curiously repetitive prank.

Dorothy Fane shrugged her shoulders. "He can look out for himself," she said, carelessly.

CHAPTER IX

"AND you are happy?"

Lensky studied her face, his own frowning with intense interest as he put the question. As she answered, his frown smoothed away, for it was met with a contented smile.

"Yes,—I am happy. The baby is such a dear, and I am so fond of the Penges, and in three weeks we are going back to Chimes Lane."

They were sitting on the beach not far from the place where she had promised to marry him, but she did not think of this, nor, apparently, did he. Clad all in white, for the day was warm, he sat with his hands clasped round his knees and watched the quiet sea.

"You have—not heard from Peele again?"

"No. And I am sure that he will keep his word in the spirit as well as in the letter. He is not really bad, you know, and—well, you read the letter."

"It was a charming letter. I met him the other day. He and his wife were staying with the Wights, and I was at the Ryburys'. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Yes, please."

Pam's big, flat straw hat was tilted over her eyes, and she was very sunburned, so his frankly investigating glance failed to enlighten him as to what effect his news was having on her.

"He is a very clever man,—he and the Duke got to talking politics one night after dinner and Peele was—wonderful. Not exactly brilliant, or witty, but so tremendously sound and convincing. He changed my mind for me in about seven minutes. It is certainly a pity he has given up active politics."

"Yes. There was a time when he was considered, by those who know, to be one of the most promising men in the Liberal party. And he was—very keen. His health was bad for a long time after his marriage; he has some kind of heart-trouble, which partly explains his—idleness."

Lensky brushed some sand off his blue silk socks and changed his position. "He went out of his way to be civil to me," he continued, "and we had several talks together. He didn't mention you, of course, but I could see that the Duchess had told him."

"Oh, yes! He—he spoke to me about it the last time I saw him."

"About our engagement?"

His matter-of-fact pronouncing of the simple words seemed to her to present in a concrete form what had for a long time been a mere shadowy idea. They had been engaged, then, after all, she and this man, and he had not forgotten it!

"Yes. The Duchess had told him that day, and—that was why he—why he came."

"Oh! Well,—he evidently wanted to be particularly amiable to me. I am sorry for his wife."

"Why?"

"Because she adores him. It must be very disagreeable for a woman to adore a husband who doesn't care a button for her!"

"Yes," answered Pam, very humbly. Lensky stared.

"Oh, you child," he cried, "do you feel as though it were your fault? Well, it isn't. Women will never learn, I suppose, that if their husbands are not in love with them they will fall in love with Miss Jones if not with Mrs. Smith or Miss Robinson! It is so often a case of mental condition rather than the *coup de foudre;* but—what woman will believe it?"

Pam laughed. "You ought to write a book. Do you," she added, enjoying the safety of asking him the question, "judge of your own experience?"

"Yes. When I met you, for instance, I was ready to fall in love with somebody; not with anybody,—observe the difference—and—you came."

After a moment Pam commented with a nod, and a laugh, "And then—I went."

"Yes. You went,—alas," with a rococo little air of gallant regret.

Pam looked at him, and wondered whether she dared warn him not to pin his hopes to Dorothy Fane. But, although she felt as much at ease with him as if, she put it hypothetically, she had been his grandmother, she did not venture to mention Lady Freddy.

"Shall we go on?" she began, after a pause. "I promised to be home by four, and it must be nearly that now."

Their way led to the beach which, first curving into the

picturesque but not altogether fragrant village of Bumblemouth proper, gradually led eastward again.

"What about Wantage?" asked Lensky, as they left the last of the Bumblemouth cottages behind them.

"He is still butterflying. To-morrow he comes down to see Pammy."

"Do you call her Pammy?"

"Yes. Isn't it too hideous for words? I say, Jack,—isn't it too bad about Buzzy and Sidney Blythe?"

"Why too bad?"

"I mean about his hair."

"Ah, bah! If a woman I loved wouldn't marry me because I was bald I shouldn't bother her! It's the only thing I dislike about Miss Penge, and I hate it. Lady Freddy wouldn't be so childish."

"Poor Dorothy! Tell me about her husband."

"Poor old Freddy! He's a thorough bad lot, but I rather love him."

"So does she," blurted out Pam, with one of the heedless impulses she had so tried to get over. "I mean——"

"Do you think she cares for him still?" asked Lensky, suddenly facing her.

"Yes, I do. I'd no business to say so, but I do."

"Then,—Heaven help her."

He looked more moved than Pam had ever seen him, his eyes darkened with distress, his mouth twisted as if with pain. Pam's heart sank. She had not thought he would care so much, but this evidently was more than mere sympathy,—a strong personal feeling was, she could see, involved. And

for a moment she hated Dorothy for her inconsiderate behaviour.

Before she had to speak, however, he had shaken off the mood that distressed her, and changed the subject of conversation. They found Miss Wantage and Cassandra in Mrs. Pounder's little garden. The baby, when she saw Pam, laughed and held out her arms. Pam caught her up and kissed her.

"Isn't she a dear?" the girl cried, "and you see how she knows me?"

De Lensky nodded, and inspected the child judicially. "She has improved," he remarked, "but her nose is still very queer. What's that horrid thing round her neck?"

"It *isn't* horrid. It's arrow-root and very good for her tooth. Isn't her hair delicious?"

"Charming. On the whole, I congratulate you. *Bellina, la piccina,*" he added to the nurse, who nodded in delight and embarked in an ecstatic catalogue of the child's perfections, sure of sympathy from the beautiful gentleman with the beautiful smile.

The next time Pam saw Lady Freddy she promptly attacked her on the subject of Lensky.

"Is Jack in love with you?" she asked point-blank.

Lady Freddy smiled. "I'm sure I don't know. What do you think?"

"I think—well,—I'm afraid he is,—or going to be. Couldn't you be just a wee bit less nice to him, Dolly? It would be so awful, you know, if he got—hurt."

Dorothy smiled again. "One would think you had

adopted him as well as Pammy," she said. "Well, he's gone now, and I shan't see him till December, but if you really think there's any danger, I'll—be less nice. Though I honestly believe Master Jack quite capable of taking care of himself." Then she added, very kindly, one hand laid on Pam's arm, "Don't get the old-maidish habit of taking care of your friends, dear. No one can iron out one's mental wrinkles but one's self——"

Pam burst out laughing. "Oh, you darling! Indeed I *do* mind my own business as a rule, but I'm so fond of Jack, and you told me yourself that you were so friendly with him —for your own reasons. And you are so awfully attractive, you know!"

Lady Freddy shrugged her shoulders. "Am I? I know one person who doesn't think so. However——"

"I'm afraid you think too much about—that person," ventured Pam, full of pity for this woman whose story bore such a strange resemblance to her own.

"Think! And do *you* think that I can help it? Oh, Pam, you are so young, and know so little. I did the right thing, didn't I? And the 'only thing a self-respecting woman'—etc. Well, I tell you now that there isn't a moment in my life that I don't regret it! If he were mine now I'd keep him if he *murdered*. And I'd be happier than I am this way!"

She clasped her hands until the knuckles whitened. "Nobody knows but you,—but it is a relief to tell you. If he beat me and—did everything else possible, I'd not suffer this way."

And Pam, listening, failed to understand.

She had succeeded in putting Peele out of her life, and comparative peace had crowned her success.

This woman had divorced the man she despised, but no peace had come to her. Why?

"She must be stronger than I," decided the girl, humbly, "her affections are so much deeper."

September waned, and October came; a rainy, misty month, brown and russet and grey.

The Penges, who had stayed on so long because of an attack of gout that nailed the inventor of the great pills to his chair, left Hinchingly on the fifth, and on the tenth the two Pams and Cassandra went to town.

Pilgrim, who had preceded them by several days, met them at the Chimes Lane door with one of the heartiest smiles seen on her grim face for years.

"Oh, Pam, how I 'ave missed you! And 'ow well she looks. 'Ow d'you do, Cassandra?"

Pam took the baby from her nurse and herself carried the little creature over the threshold.

"Welcome home, Pammy darling," she whispered, her heart warm.

Ah, how cosy it all looked. And how the fires blazed and glowed, and how good her lonely dinner was, at the round table in the Oak Hall.

It seemed years since that horrible travesty of a meal with de Lensky, and a certain middle-aged contentment had settled down on her. The storms had died, and the wreckage was cleared away. And upstairs,—though how differently

from the way of her dreams,—lay the baby in her cradle in the long room with the two windows!

As to Peele,—her love for him was like an unwelcome inmate of a household. It had come, and to stay. It sat in the chimney-corner preventing all young mirth, all great joy, but at least she was now used to it, could look it in the face without flinching, and the calmness that inevitably follows the brave acceptance of any trouble, was hers.

And the unwelcome guest could not follow her to one sanctuary. Into the room with the cradle he could not come, and when the baby was in her arms he slunk away, abashed.

CHAPTER X

ONE morning Pam sat by the fire in the White Study with the baby on her lap. Before them knelt Cassandra in adoration, and behind her, a grim figure enough, but deeply interested, stood Pilgrim.

It was a red-letter day, for it marked an important milestone in the development of Miss Wantage's intelligence.

"It's only a minute now, Pilly," cried Pam, breathlessly; "don't *stare* at her so, or you'll frighten her. Now then,—hark, Baby! Listen, Heart's Delight!"

And verily, as Big Ben struck the hour, the baby turned, as she had turned at the preceding quarter and smiled a toothless but radiant smile in the direction from which the music seemed to come.

"She is going to be *very* musical," announced Pam sententiously. "Isn't it wonderful, Pilly? And she not yet six months old! *Che gioia,* eh, Cassandra?"

"I'm not so sure, Miss Pam," remarked Pilgrim, "when you was 'er age, you used to laugh like anythink when your puppaw made 'is watch strike!"

"I don't believe it! You're always iconoclasting, you old wretch! Come, Heart's Delight, pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake——"

Pilgrim, who had been summoned to witness the repetition of the phenomenon relative to the chimes, retired with an

injured toss of her new brown hair, and Pam and the nurse were still busy worshipping when de Lensky came in.

"You,—at this time of day! But be welcome,—sit down. What," she added, as the Italian withdrew, "is the matter?"

Lensky looked for him, disturbed, and for the first time she saw his hair slightly ruffled as if by the passage of a restless hand.

"It's this," he answered, sitting down and explaining with his usual directness, "Freddy Fane is going to marry."

"Freddy Fane!"

"Yes. A chorus-girl. I saw him last night and—he was a little drunk,—he told me. It is—horrible."

Pam stared. "But—why shouldn't he marry? And *whatever* the girl is she must be good enough for him!"

"Too good for him, but that's not the point. The point is that Dorothy Fane will be awfully upset about it. She—I've seen her twice of late, did I tell you?—And——" he broke off, biting his lips nervously. "And—so I've come to you."

"To me?"

"Yes. Someone must tell her,—alone. She mustn't just hear it accidentally, or she'd—give herself away. She—in two words, will *you* tell her?"

For a moment Pam was silent, and then she answered slowly, "Yes, I will, if you want me to."

"Thanks! I knew you would. She's in town to-day with Buzzy,—at Claridge's. Will you let me send her a wire in your name asking her to come here?"

"Yes. Anything you like. I am *so* sorry for her!"

"So am I," he returned gravely.

But Pam, though she longed to, dared not add that she was still sorrier for de Lensky himself. There was to her something inexpressibly pitiful in the slight disorder of his hair, and his unwonted and marked nervousness distressed her deeply.

"Please don't tell her I told you," began Lensky at length, lighting a cigarette. "Just say you know it to be true. I shouldn't like her to know we have talked her over."

"We *haven't* talked her over. I don't believe you ever talked over one of your friends in your life,—no matter with whom."

"I try not to," he answered with a certain simplicity; "no one shows the same side to different people, and the side I am shown is *mine,* and I never show it to a third person any more than I'd read aloud to anyone a letter written to me."

"I read you—Mr. Peele's."

"That was different," he returned; "I was trying to help you, as if I were your brother,—though you don't need much help. I wish poor Lady Freddy were more like you."

"Good Heavens! By the way, you'll lunch with me? It's half-past one now."

"With pleasure, if you'll let me go out and wire Lady Freddy first."

When he came back the baby had fallen asleep and Pam was huddled on the divan crooning to it under her breath.

"Ring twice, will you?"

He stood waiting for someone to come, his gaze fixed

intently on Pam. She was far from belonging to the conventional Madonna type, but she looked like a young gipsy mother hushing her baby, her dark head bent.

When the nurse had carried away the child Lensky said gently, "I am so glad about the little girl. She will be a great comfort to you."

"Ah, yes,—and a protection," she answered, her eyes very grave, "and now let's go and eat much flesh and drink much wine."

Her task of breaking to Lady Freddy the news of her ex-husband's culminating offence was a hard one, and she could have faced it with much greater confidence if she had been prepared in some measure by Lensky. She knew by his manner that there were complications of which she was unaware, but she so thoroughly understood his peculiar code of loyalty that she did not for a second contemplate asking him for elucidation, and when he began chatting about the Duchess, about Evelyn, about a variety of more or less amusing town gossip, she followed his lead, instinctively trusting in the wisdom of his way.

"There are no delightful *potins* this autumn," he declared, "no woman has even accused another of cheating at Bridge!"

"I hope you are not gambling awfully," remarked Pam, as the maid left the room.

He laughed. "No. I am at present leading a blameless life in that respect,—*triste nécessité, du reste.* Moreover, I'm never as bad as I'm painted: like another young man of whom we've all heard."

"I'm glad of that. Dorothy told me awful tales in September."

"I know. They were true,—I told her myself. But I shall never ruin myself at cards, though I confess to you that I know nothing so engrossing, so enchanting in the world, as a game of bac. It carries one completely away,—one forgets everything else on earth, nothing else matters. It is glorious excitement."

"You ought to try steeple-chasing."

"Steeple-chasing! No! I prefer *chemin de fer* any day, to any kind of riding!"

"Well, I'm glad you say you'll never ruin yourself. I don't like 'bringing-up' my friends, but I should hate to have you really hurt yourself."

"You need not worry. I am not a spendthrift, and—I shall marry some day. My estates are entailed, and my name is an old one."

Pam nodded. "Of course." But she resolved to make Dorothy Fane see the necessity of letting him know that she never could marry him.

After luncheon they sat talking for an hour, and then he left, promising to return the next day to learn the result of her interview with Lady Freddy.

"To-morrow is my twenty-ninth birthday, by the way," she added, giving him her hand, "so we'll take a walk to celebrate, and then—can you dine with me?"

"With great pleasure. *Au revoir,* then."

Lady Freddy came at four o'clock, looking very handsome and a little excited.

"Only came up yesterday," she explained, "and am going to Paris on Tuesday. How are you, and is anything wrong?"

"Sit down. I have something to tell you——"

"And I to tell you! Sid's hair is beginning to grow. That is, we *think* it's hair! Something is coming up on his scalp the past ten days, and we spend our time watching it. Buzzy is so absurd, she wants to sprinkle bone-dust over it, and goes on in the most insane way, but—she is very happy about it."

"I *am* so glad. Only I think she might have taken him on trust."

"So do I! I—but what is the matter?"

Suddenly Pam lost her nerve. "Nothing. I—but you look as if something had happened. What is it?"

Lady Freddy blushed scarlet. "Oh,—I—well, yes, I'll tell you. I—I am going to see Freddy to-morrow."

"Going to see——"

"Yes." Her dark face so curiously like Pam's, for all its beauty, glowed with shamefaced happiness.

"I—couldn't stand it any longer, and—I just wrote and asked him to come to see me. I had a wire from him this morning—he is coming."

This, then, was what Lensky had known; and Fane himself must have told him. Pam's breath caught in her throat, and then after a pause she rushed at her fence.

"You mustn't see him, Dorothy," she said, boldly, "he is going to marry again."

Lady Freddy sat quite still. Then she asked quietly, "Whom?"

"Oh—a girl. That doesn't matter, does it? I heard it and wanted to tell you myself. I—was afraid it would be a shock."

"A shock," repeated the other woman, bitterly, "a shock! You don't know what the word means. It has broken something in me—not my heart,—I don't know what, but—something." After a long silence during which she walked nervously about the little room, she went on, "Oh, take my advice, Pam, and never love a man. Even good ones hurt us, and bad ones like *him*—crucify us. I am crucified now,——" Again she walked across the room, where she stood staring at a print of an old man in pink drinking a pint of ale in front of an ale-house.

"Buzzy thinks she loves Sidney,—now that his hair is growing. And there is only one word for what she feels, and what I feel. It is—laughable. Now I must go. Thanks for telling me, Pam; you are a dear little thing. I hope you'll always understand me as little as you do now!"

"Perhaps I understand—better than you think, Dolly."

Lady Freddy laughed. "You child! Well,—one thing,—I shall not go on bearing his name much longer. *That woman* will be 'Lady Freddy Fane,'—oh, my God! I—I shall marry, Pam." Lady Freddy's face was rigid with sudden determination as she took the girl's hand. "And—*he* shan't know that—that I am such a fool."

"Wouldn't it be rather—banal—to marry out of pique?"

Pam spoke with deliberate coolness, but her effort had no effect.

"No. No one will know! And—I could marry to-morrow, if I chose! There may," she added, laughing more naturally, "be hope now for your protegé, Jack!"

Pam's brows met in a quick frown. "You shan't marry Jack out of—spite, Dorothy!"

Lady Freddy took the girl's chin in her hand and looked into her eyes. "Dear loyal little Pam! No,—Jack is too good for that, but—I like him the best of all,—and—who knows? Ah,—and *he* is coming to see me to-morrow!"

When she was alone, Pam sat down on the rug and built up her fire. She had never before recognised the fact that her knowledge of Peele's suffering had greatly helped to mitigate her own. He loved her in his way as much as she loved him, and he longed for her even more than she longed for him. So her jealousy lay dormant.

But suppose he were free, and she should hear that he was going to marry another woman.

At the very thought she groaned aloud, and then, deserting her fire, fled upstairs to the baby.

CHAPTER XI

IT rained on the fourteenth of November that year, rained in a pathetic, hopeless way as if it didn't much care about doing so, but could not help it. And it also fogged.

Pam, very smart in her one new frock, a dark, tailor-made coat and skirt, and a mannish felt hat, went in the morning to see the Duchess, who presented her with a little pearl brooch and wished her many happy returns of the day.

"Thanks. One's twenty-ninth birthday isn't a very joyous occasion, I suppose, but I feel strangely resigned to growing old, somehow."

"*H'm!* What about poor Jack?"

"*Dear* Jack,—he is coming this afternoon to help celebrate. But please don't waste any pity on him, Duchess. He got over his attack of Pamania with the most unflattering ease, and we are now the best of friends."

"I know,—but—well, I've never asked any questions about your breaking your engagement, and I'm not going to begin now, but broken engagements have been known to mend,——"

Pam laughed. "Not this one! You must just make up your mind to let me live and die an old maid, and before you know it you'll be plotting against *young* Pam's liberty."

"I'm sure I don't know what Oswald would say if he knew you had adopted a baby! Of course you are prepared to have people in the future say she is your *own.*"

"'Say? What do they say? Let them say,'" quoted the girl cheerfully. "If I had a motto, that would be it. And I am sure my G.F. would have been delighted to know that I am no longer alone. Not that I ever minded being alone," she added, "but most people think one must. You must come to lunch and see the baby, will you? Pilly, in the rôle of grandmother, is exquisite!"

"She must be! What do you hear from your mother?"

"Oh, I never hear from Mother. Father writes occasionally. I heard from him in August,—they are both well and so pleased about the house. I shall soon have another letter,—for my birthday. Have you," she went on, changing the subject deliberately, "seen anything of the delectable Ratty and his wife?"

The Duchess laughed. "Yes. His importance on the impending arrival is something most impressive. It is to be a boy. And I've no doubt Ratty will take to his bed on the great day as the men of certain African tribes do."

"Poor old Ratty. I am so glad he's happy; his misery, absurd as it was, used to make me quite wretched."

"Yes,—he was rather pitiful,—different from de Lensky! I can even now hardly believe that the serene Jack ever was a Pamaniac."

"He wasn't," avowed Pam, sincerely, "he told me himself, down at Bumblemouth, that it was chiefly because the time had arrived for him to—well, to fall in love,—and that I appeared as the hour struck."

"Is he still worshipping Lady Freddy Fane?"

Pam rose. "Yes,—apparently. When I die, he ought

to have me stuffed and mounted as a souvenir of the one plain woman he ever looked at!"

She went home in a hansom, a rare treat for her in these days of economy, to save her new clothes, and when de Lensky arrived, at about three, he found her in an old coat and skirt, and the hat she had worn that day in St. Giles' Churchyard.

"I *must* have some exercise," she declared, shaking hands with him, "so if you don't mind, we'll go for a tramp and then come back for tea,—unless you'd like to invite Pilly and me to tea at your rooms?"

"Come to tea by all means,—but I should most awfully mind a tramp in the rain! I loathe a wetting, and I've got on thin shoes."

She laughed. "All right, then let's go to the Abbey and prance round and round the Cloister, will you? I *must* have a walk."

He agreed without comment to this plan, and once again it occurred to her how remarkably consistent he was. He disliked getting wet, and said so without apology, either indifferent to the possibility of her thinking him a muff, or tranquilly certain that she would not make this mistake. So they took a four-wheeler to Old Dean's Yard and hurried under dripping umbrellas into the Cloister where he had first spoken to her.

"Now," he said, as they started walking briskly towards Jane Lister's tablet, "tell me about Lady Freddy."

"I told her,—and she thanked me," returned Pam, taking a leaf out of his own book.

"Did she—tell you nothing?"

She looked at him. "She told me several things, some of which you know, some of which you don't. Do you think I ought to say any more?"

"No. Well,—thanks for telling her. I—it troubled me horribly."

"I saw that. You are very fond of her, aren't you?"

"Very. I like them all, but Dorothy is the one of whom I am fondest. It—made me perfectly miserable, knowing about Fane's engagement, and that she—would have to be told."

For several minutes they walked in silence, while Pam turned over and over in her hurrying mind the question of the best way for her to broach the subject that was occupying it.

"'Jane Lister, deare childe,'" he read, stopping and looking up at the words. "Do you remember?"

"Of course I do! Nearly two years ago, too. Isn't it strange to think that it is so long!"

"It seems much longer to me," he returned, gravely.

"Does it? Well, yes. I daresay it does. Look here, Jack, may I say something to you?"

He came closer, looking at her. "You may say anything to me, dear friend."

"But—it's really a—a terrifically *cheeky* thing,—you won't be angry?"

"No. What is," he smiled very sweetly at her, "the terrific thing?"

On the grass beyond the arches the rain fell steadily; it was very still in the old place, the last minor canon had

flitted past into the Abbey for the evening service. Pam hesitated for a moment, and then, laying her hand on Lensky's arm, looked into his beautiful, clear, eyes.

"You are very fond of Dolly Fane," she said, slowly, "well,—not just yet, of course, but later,—I think—I am quite sure she would marry you."

Lensky turned very white. "Lady Freddy marry me! What do you mean?" he asked sternly.

"I mean just what I say,—you needn't glare at me,—you promised not to be angry. I think that when the first—pain—of that beast's marriage is over, she might marry you."

For several minutes he was silent, and when he answered it was in a queer choked voice that half frightened her.

"Do you mean that? Whether you do, or not, it is—abominable."

It was the first time she had ever seen him even annoyed, and this anger was, she saw, very intense. It seemed so utterly disproportionate to her offence, if offence there really were, that she stared at his white face in absolute dismay.

"I—I don't see why you are so furious," she protested. "I *asked* you if I might say it."

"Do you really think I love Dorothy Fane?" he retorted, paying no attention to her words. "Do you really think that?"

"Yes—I—I did. And not only I. Several people thought it."

"Several people! Did they know what you knew?"

He forced a laugh, but it was not a pleasant one. "You don't seem to know that you are insulting me."

"That is ridiculous," answered Pam, shortly.

"Perhaps it is." He made a visible effort to control himself, but he failed. The door of his patience had given way, and out rushed the waters of wrath.

"Two years ago I asked you to marry me," he said, his accent very marked. "A year ago I asked you again. I asked you to marry me because I loved you. Do you know what love is? Does it change with a few short months? Is it a cloak that one puts on and takes off as the weather changes? Do you think I'm a school-boy not to know my own mind? Do you think me a fool who did not know what he was saying? What did you think my love was? A fancy,—a—a flirtation? I—what are *you*, of what are *you* made, to judge me so? Of what worth are your feelings that you so misunderstood mine?"

"Please try to control yourself," answered Pam, "I dislike heroics."

His voice changed again, growing a shade more unrecognisable in its white anger. "Heroics! Ah, yes. The scorn of the Anglo-Saxon for the savage Continental! Did I annoy you with heroics when without a thought for me you broke our engagement? Did I bore you with melodrama when you went away and I heard nothing of you for months? And when I came to your Villa, was I—over-emotional? No! You wanted a friend, and because I loved you I could make myself into the semblance of one for you; you wanted a confidant and I listened to your stories of that other man; I even read his letters! I watched you holding that baby in your arms,—your arms that should have held *my* children.

You wanted an old woman to talk to, and I, who never lie, never pose, pretended to be that old woman. And this is what you give me in return. Not even enough understanding to know that because a man can control himself, he is not—bah! You don't deserve love like mine! Well,——" Suddenly he broke off, and taking his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his forehead,—his face that looked old and worn.

Pam stood quite still. She had, then, lost her friend, or what was worse, he had never been her friend. Her anger had gone, leaving her feeling very young, and lonely, and pitiful.

A great sorrow for herself swelled her throat. Lensky took his glass and polished it. Then putting his handkerchief away, he said very gently, "I—beg your pardon. Can you forgive me, before I go?"

"I—of course I forgive you. And—can you forgive me? I must have hurt you a hundred times, but—I didn't know."

He smiled. "Ah, yes,—a *thousand* times, but you didn't know. Now will you please go. I shall stay here a little while, and go out by Victoria Street."

She held out her hand. "You mean,—good-bye for always?"

"Yes. It's the only way. Go home to the baby and be—blessed. Good-bye."

Her eyes filled with stinging tears. It seemed as if the very foundations of things were giving way, now that he had failed her. "Good-bye," she said with a little haughty humble nod. Then she left him standing alone by deare Jane Lister's tomb.

CHAPTER XII

IT was hard, after months of happiness in her belief in Lensky's friendship, for Pam to have to entirely readjust her state of mind regarding him. She had been extremely angry when he first lost his head in the Cloisters, and her anger was not unmixed with the Anglo-Saxon's scorn for what she had roughly classified as heroics. If this white-faced, ranting man was the real de Lensky, if this unbridled fury expressed his genuine character, then where was the serene, bland-tempered little gentleman in whom she had so oddly trusted?

The lines in the face in the Cloisters had so changed it that it was almost inconceivable that it was the one that had grown to be so very dear to the solitary woman, and for days she could not forget it. In her dreams it came to her, haggard, threatening, almost terrible in its absolute surrender to fury, and as she went her daily round of simple duties and pleasures it seemed to stare at her from corners and lurk near her wherever she was.

The absolute silence that followed his disappearance from her ken, served, too, to enhance the queer kind of frightened loneliness that oppressed her. If he had written to say again that he was sorry, she could easier have found her bearings, but she heard not a word from him as time passed, and November merged into December.

"Of course he wouldn't write," she told herself more than once, "if he did, it would be utterly inconsistent——" And

then she came to a halt, for the enormous, almost grotesque inconsistency of his behaviour in the Cloister had pulled into a shapeless heap of ruins the mental image she had set up of him.

He had been savage, rough, almost brutal, he had in a few words denied all his former conduct; gone his beautiful equanimity, his grave gentleness, how was she to picture him? If his imperturbable calm was but a pose, was his violence the real keynote to his character?

Was he only a savage with a clever veneer of civilisation? Then, remorsefully, she admitted that she herself had been greatly to blame. Engrossed in her own misery she had barely considered the possibility of his suffering, and since the day she had first seen him at the Villa she had been only too glad to accept the clever travesty of contentment that he presented to her, as the real thing. It was quite true that she had underestimated the quality of his love for her; quite true that she had used him, as he had said. And being essentially though not always logically just, she soon came to the point of forgiving him his Slavic outburst; she had, in all innocence driven him beyond his powers of endurance, and while an Englishman would have been much milder in his outbreak, Lensky had, she realised, only after many months of a marvellous self-control quite impossible to ninety-nine Englishmen in a hundred, lost his head in his own way.

Therefore she, who had brought him to this point through sheer thick-headed stupidity, had no right to be angry with him.

And her anger ebbed away, leaving only a miserable high-water mark of lonely longing for the friend she had in reality never had. How dull she had been! How foolishly unobservant. And how almost insultingly ready to believe in the sudden death of his feeling for her.

Even the baby could not hold at bay the white-faced phantom that had come to haunt the old house in Chimes Lane.

"You look as if you'd lost your last friend, Miss Pam," Pilgrim remarked once, with all the acidity of ignorant anxiety, and Pam gave a forlorn little laugh. "I have, Pilly, dear," she returned, "or rather, the only one I ever had." For now that he had gone, she realised better every day what he had been to her. She had adored her grandfather, she was very fond of the Duchess, and Buzzy Penge was most sympathetic to her, but none of these people had been a real friend. And to de Lensky there had been nothing that she could not say. There were none of the queer, inexplicable reserves that blood-relationship usually imposes, none of the shyness that frivolous age sometimes awakes in serious youth, none of the superficiality of comprehension contingent on a new acquaintance, however sympathetic.

In a word, Lensky had been to her someone, and something, quite undefinable and new. And now he was gone and she was alone. One day she found in a book of quotations one from Jean Paul that, retrospectively, fitted the case to piteous perfection:—"Thou speakest to me of things which in all my endless life I have found not, and shall not find."

"I thought he was something that 'in all my endless life I have found not, and shall not find,'" she said, sadly.

So, with a weary heart she again set herself to the task of fighting down and forgetting an enveloping trouble. It was very uphill work, for this time she was not ashamed of the feeling that bound her; her affection for Lensky was one that she need not blush for, and pride failed to come to her aid. She missed him a dozen times a day, for though she had not seen him often, the possibility of doing so had formerly been constant, and now he was as much gone as if he had left the country.

For she knew that having said good-bye to her he would never come back. He had done what made a pretence of friendship impossible, and would now, she was sure, set to work to make the best of things as they stood. Even if she should meet him accidentally there would be no backsliding. He would be polite, conventionally cordial and friendly, and at the first opportunity slip gracefully away from her. It was hopeless. He had gone, and she had lost him for the rest of "her endless life." At this period the baby did her best to enliven the household by really producing the tooth her godmother had long expected, and following closely on this event came another of a very different nature.

One evening as Pam sat reading in the White Study, Cyril Wantage came in looking very much distressed.

"I've come to tell you that I've been turfed out by old Butterflies," he declared, at once, sitting down and rubbing his hands before the fire; "pleasant, isn't it?"

"Oh dear! But why?"

"Well,—he saw me kiss his parlour-maid."

"Cyril!"

"I know. Disgraceful, infra dig. and all that kind of thing, wasn't it? However, I enjoyed it and so did she, and really it wasn't any of the old brute's business. He thought it necessary to do the outraged hospitality act, I lost my temper—I wish I could lose it so I'd never find it again —and we parted. So here I am."

Pam drew a deep sigh. He had been doing so much better than she had ventured to hope; his wife's death had so seemed to steady him, and here he was, scarcely seven months later, kissing parlour-maids.

She made no reference to Mary, however, and sat for some time staring into the fire. "What are you going to do?" she asked, at last, looking at him.

"Look for another job, I suppose. How's the baby?"

"Very well. She has a tooth," returned Pam, absently. "If you want to see her, ring, will you?"

She was very unwilling to say anything that might savour of lecturing, but there was in his whole air something that displeased her. Having taken the burden of his irresponsibility on her shoulders she had never contemplated shirking it, but this weak jauntiness recalled to her old fears for him that she had almost forgotten.

"Ask Cassandra to bring the baby, please," she said to the maid who answered Wantage's ring. That he was the baby's father bound her to this man, too; she must continue to help him as much as she could, but he must understand that her financial condition was one that necessitated strict

economy. She was explaining this to him when the baby appeared, and the new tooth was proudly displayed by the nurse, who appeared to believe that she deserved all the credit of the phenomenon.

"Jolly big kiddy, isn't she? And, I say, she is beginning to look like my mater! Upon my word she is,—something about the eyes!"

He took the baby and played with her affectionately, displaying much skill in his management of her small person. Pam watched them silently. He was Pammy's father, and as such must be helped, and kept straight. With a pang she reflected that Ratty Maxse's father, whom she had known only in his singularly unattractive middle age, must, at Wantage's age, have been much like that pleasant though forceless young fellow.

"And poor old Dick was *so* horrible!" she thought, with a sigh.

"I say,—look at her laugh! Give daddy a kiss. Boo, what a wet kiss, nassy baby!"

"What a charming domestic picture!"

Wantage turned as Pam started up to meet the Duchess, who, burly and shapeless in a fur cloak, had come in unobserved.

"I heard voices and baby-talk, so I came in without being announced. I suppose you are this infant prodigy's father?"

"I am." He bowed rather charmingly, the baby crumpled up against his waistcoat, and Pam introduced him to the old lady.

"I was in the neighbourhood, my dear," the Duchess

explained, sitting down. "No, don't unhook me, I can't stay—and just ran in to say howdy. I've had a deadly day. Henny's house is being painted, as I told you, and she and Jim are with me. They do bore me so—together. I enjoy both of 'em when the other isn't there; isn't it unfortunate? And James' private secretary has left very suddenly, and a stream of horribly 'gentlemany' young men have been coming since dawn, for him to choose from,—it has been awful!"

"I hope he got a good one," returned Pam, absently, abstracting from the baby's mouth the penwiper that lady was slily tasting.

"No, that's the worst of it. He writes such a vile hand and loathes a typewriter,—none of 'em wrote well enough to suit him, so they've all gone their weary ways, and the great post is still unfilled."

"Is that Mr. Peele, Duchess, may I ask," inquired Wantage, with civil interest. "I remember meeting him years ago, with poor old Charnley Burke."

"Yes. He married my daughter. Your baby is a very pleasant person, Mr. Wantage; you must be proud of her." As she spoke, the old lady rose. "Well, good-bye, Pam, come and see me next week,—*they* leave to-morrow. Henny has been ill again; I'm sure it's her appendix, but she says it isn't, and I suppose she ought to know. Good-bye, Mr. Wantage——"

Pam went with her to the door, and then went back to the Study. She was grateful to Cyril for not, as she had for a moment feared he intended doing, proposing himself for the vacant secretaryship.

I am sorry that you have lost your position," she said, as he smiled up from the rug where in the character of some strange wild beast he was growling and gambolling for the baby; "let's send her upstairs and get some newspapers and try to find something that might suit you."

CHAPTER XIII

TWO days later Pam received a letter from James Peele postmarked Torpington. She was sitting in the nursery when it was brought to her, and for several minutes sat staring at the address while the blood rushed to her face with a heat that almost burnt her.

He had broken his promise, then, and after all the struggles she should have to begin over again. And she had no Lensky to whom to turn for strength.

She felt herself so helpless, so alone, that she thought with a shiver, "If he insists on seeing me—if he breaks his word and comes, and I see him—can I be brave and send him away?" A quick memory of Dorothy Fane came to her, too, as she sat in the quiet room near the sleeping child. Lady Freddy had been strong only to be horribly, humiliatingly weak afterwards. She believed that if she had not been so strong she would have been happier!

And if Peele came,—if, in his quality of master, he came to her now, after her years of brave struggle, should she not do better to yield to him? To let him love her, and to let herself love him? For a moment she closed her eyes, and remembered the feel of his arms round her, the touch of his lips on hers, and then with a fierce frown and shake of her head, came to her senses.

"Fool!" she called herself, angrily, "I am a fool, and he is a knave. But I must read his letter and know how to meet his attack!"

The letter ran as follows:

"My dear Miss Yeoland,—

"You will, I am sure, excuse my writing to you on a matter of business. I am in search of a private secretary, and among some twenty young men who have come to me to offer themselves for the position, the one I best like is Cyril Wantage. I met him once years ago with poor Burke, but I know nothing of his character except what he himself tells me. He writes a good hand, which is very important for me, and as he tells me that you are personally interested in his welfare, I should be doubly glad to employ him. He begged me not to mention his application to you, but I am hoping that you will confirm his statements, and that you will be pleased by my giving him easy and well-paid employment. Trusting that you are well and happy, I am,

"Yours sincerely,

"James Peele."

Pam rose and went into her room, instinctively taking her anger with Wantage away from his child's bedside. It was abominable, outrageous, of him to have done this thing; to have used her name as a means of currying favour with Peele. And how artfully he had concealed his design from her, letting her make a list of advertisements for him to answer, and trying to persuade Peele not to tell her of his application.

That Peele had written to her was, she admitted, excusable, and his letter was, in itself, faultless. Even if he had not wished to please her by helping her protégé, as Wantage

had obviously declared himself to be, it was most natural that he should write to her for references. And that she held in her hand the success or the failure of Wantage's sly scheming, made matters only worse.

Should she write and refuse to recommend the baby's father for this delightful post? Should she, by refusing to help him, be the first to push him into the downward path for which his indolent feet were so evidently bound? Or should she assist him by using, even thus indirectly, her influence over Peele?

After an hour's brooding thought she wrote and sent off the following letter:

"My dear Mr. Peele,—

"I had no idea that Mr. Wantage was going to apply for the position of your secretary, but if he pleases you, can see no reason why you should not engage him.

"Yours sincerely,

"Pamela Yeoland."

This matter disposed of, she lay down on the divan in the White Study, and went to sleep. Dreams so rarely have any perceptible bearing on the thoughts occupying the mind of the dreamer, it was rather remarkable that Pam should dream of Peele, but so it was.

She was standing by the fountain at Hinchingly, with Lady Freddy, who told her, as they stood in the sun, of her engagement to Jack Lensky. Pam, to her own great surprise, was anything but pleased by the news, and was silent, wondering why she felt so sorry. It was a great depth of

loneliness into which she seemed to have sunk, and tears came into her eyes. "Can I be jealous?" she asked herself, angrily incredulous, and with bitter shame she was obliged to admit that she was.

Lensky, then, had at last really forgotten her, and no longer loved her. She could never again make him beside himself with fury as he had been that day in the Cloisters of the Abbey; it was no longer in her power to bring to his tranquil face those anguished, terrifying lines that she had seen there. He would now meet her with pleasant, superficial amiability, would neither seek nor shun her; her day was done, and Dorothy Fane's begun.

Then, still in the blazing summer sun, Lady Freddy left her. "I am going to meet him," she said, and walked away towards the house. Pam stood still, a tempest of anger and pain in her heart, and watched a man rapidly crossing the lawn toward Lady Freddy.

It was Lamartine, as she had first seen him, that day in the fog, two years before; the exquisite, dandified Lamartine in the glossy top-hat, with a white flower in his coat. And he was going straight to Lady Freddy, without a look for Pam, who wanted him so miserably. Forgetting all shame in her loneliness, she stretched out her arms and cried, "Oh, look at me, look!"

And then he turned, but he was James Peele now, and with a low cry he took her in his arms and kissed her as he had kissed her in the Oak Hall.

And she woke, shaking and pulsing with exquisite pain, blushing with horror over her unworthy rapture, hating

herself for her dream. It was Jack she had wanted,—her old Jack whom she had believed her friend, and it was Peele who came, Peele whom she hated and dreaded, and whom she loved.

For several minutes she sat on the red divan, seeing again the stern, nervous, emotion-shaken face she had so tried to forget. She had feared the sight of his face, and avoided it manfully, and now to crown all her troubles it had come to her in this dream with the most appalling distinctness. Would it always stay there, before her eyes?

Her recent obsession, Lensky's changed face, disappeared entirely under this new one, and seemed, as she looked back on it, as a very minor affliction.

"Perhaps I'm going crazy," she almost moaned. "I'm certainly losing my nerve."

But the next day an unexpected visit raised her dangerously fluctuating spirits,—Sidney Blythe, come to show her his new hair.

"Can you see it?" he inquired, bending down into the firelight. "If you can't," he added, accommodatingly, "you may feel it!"

Pam laughed. "Thanks, but it's perfectly visible to my penetrating eye! It's *most* becoming. You don't think it's going to be red, do you?"

"Red?" he shrieked. "Red! Nonsense. It was always light-brown, why should it be red?"

"I beg your pardon; no doubt it was the firelight—and when is the wedding to be?"

"In February." He was suddenly serious, his pleasant

face gaining greatly as he spoke. "Poor Buzzy, it was hard on her, wasn't it?"

"And on you. But—even if it hadn't grown, she'd have married you in the end," answered Pam, gently.

"Yes, she would. As a matter of fact she had promised a week before there was a sign of a hair to be seen. She sent you her love, by the way, and says she would have come to see you, only Dolly is not well."

"Dolly isn't ill, I hope!"

He hesitated. "No,—but she is not well, either. Fane is an awful brute, but—I imagine she still cares for him, and he's going to marry again."

"Poor Dolly!"

"Yes. I am very fond of her, and I know you are, too, but—she hasn't Patricia's character."

"Patricia never was put to her tests," suggested Pam, mildly.

"Of course not. I only meant that it would have been better if Dorothy had either stuck to Fane or stopped bothering about him when she had once got rid of him."

Pam burst out laughing. "Oh, most wise judge! However—I quite agree with you that it would have been better for her."

Blythe rose. "I must be off. Glad to have found you. How's the baby, by the way?"

"Well, thanks. Good-bye. Give my love to all the Penges, including the Earl of Fauntleroy Penge. And I am *so* glad about your hair. Good gracious," she added, looking at him closely, "your eyelashes!"

He nodded. "Yes, the wretched things are shrinking visibly. It *is* a blessing, I can tell you. People used to turn and stare at me in the street, and now I get no more attention than any other young Greek god!"

"But oh, the beautiful lashes! Well, if you're glad, I'm glad. Good-bye."

At last Buzzy was going to be happy. Pam had borne her many troubles with a sort of unconscious stoicism, but now she felt very tired and discouraged, and her dream had still further depressed her. For she realised even more strongly than before that if chance should bring her face to face with James Peele she could never again have a peaceful minute.

He had promised not to see her, and he had kept, and would no doubt continue keeping, his word, but at best she was trusting to chance, and might at any moment be betrayed by that capricious goddess. Perhaps, after all, it would be best to rent her house,—her beloved house that of late had given her so little joy—and go to live somewhere on the Continent. The one thing in the world that seemed to her absolutely necessary was that she should be safe from the danger of ever meeting Peele. And perhaps bravery, for her, lay in flight, as it had lain for greater and better people before her.

With a deep sigh she went upstairs and put on a hat and a warm coat, for it was a bitterly cold day.

"I'm going out for a tramp, Pilly dear," she told the old woman, whom she met on the stairs; "I have a grand plan in my head, which I will tell you when I come back."

"Oh dear, Pam,—no more travelling, I 'ope? I'm that tired of rushing about the world! I'm getting old, I suppose." Pilgrim looked indeed old and tired, and Pam's heart smote her. "If we do make a move it will be a final one," she said, gently; "I'm not so young as I used to be, myself—good-bye."

As she opened the house-door she nearly ran into a man who was about to ring. "Oh, Miss Yeoland, I beg your pardon——"

He wore the Duchess's dark-blue livery, Pam saw, and looked very much agitated. "Is anything wrong?" she asked, nervously. "Her Grace——"

"No, Miss, there's nothing wrong; with 'er Grace, that is, Miss, but Lady 'Enrietta died yesterday, Miss. And 'Er Grace is—very much broken by the news——"

"Lady Henrietta! Dead!" Pam leaned against her house-door and felt the stone step under her sway like a boat.

"Yes, Miss. It was very suddent; 'er Ladyship went back to the country three days ago and Mr. Peele 'e went back—followed her—the day before yesterday, and was coming back to Berkeley Square yesterday. Instead of which, Miss, 'e wired to say 'er Ladyship 'ad died suddently. 'Er Grace has been very bad, and to-day Mrs. Williamson suggested we should fetch you, Miss."

The stone step ceased rocking and the smoke-blackened wall opposite was once more a solid body.

"Call a hansom for me, will you?" she ordered the man, and a minute later was hurrying towards Berkeley Square.

CHAPTER XIV

AT the station at Torpington the Duchess was met by her nephew, the young Duke, and taken to Peele's house, while Pam fell to the lot of a tall man, in a grey pony overcoat.

"My name is Baring-Smythe, Miss Yeoland, and as we are poor Peele's nearest neighbours, we are to have the pleasure of putting you up. My wife sent me to meet you."

Pam murmured a few words of conventional thanks, and followed her companion through the dingy waiting-room to his carriage.

"The old lady has been ill, hasn't she?" Mr. Baring-Smythe asked, as they stepped into the victoria and he wrapped her in a fur-lined rug.

"Yes. I thought the day before yesterday that she would not be able to come. She had a serious operation on her eyes a year ago,—iridectomy, they call it—and she has not been very strong ever since. And—Lady Henrietta's death was so frightfully sudden."

"Awf'ly sudden, poor lady. My wife saw her the day she came down, and she seemed all right. They say it was appendicitis—she wired Peele and he brought Biddulph, who operated, but it was too late. Awful thing, awful."

Mr. Baring-Smythe had a loud, rather deep voice that seemed vaguely familiar to Pam, but she could not place it. And his talk went on in a well-meant flow, as the carriage

made its way through the town. "Rotten little place, Torpington; my wife says she can't even get a reel of cotton in it,—but they always say that," he added, humorously; "helps 'em to get up to town oftener! That's the post-office,—and that's the Methodist Chapel. Hope you're not cold? My wife thought the fresh air would do you good, or I'd have come in a brougham. I wanted to drive you out myself, but she wouldn't let me. Thought a victoria more comfortable for you after your journey."

Pam hardly listened to him. She was watching the streets they passed through, remembering some of them, recalling days long ago when she had walked in them, days when she was seventeen.

There is, of course, always, even to very happy people, a certain gentle melancholy in going back to a place where one dreamed the dreams, hoped the hopes, of his early youth, and to Pam, brought back here by a serried force of unconquerable circumstances, a fresh pang lay in every house, every turning that she recognised.

The afternoon was clear though cold, and the low sky yet an hour from dusk.

"The Duke came yesterday, I believe," went on Mr. Baring-Smythe, at the end of a long period of vague prattle; "nice chap, and very fond of Peele. You know Peele, of course?"

"Yes," returned Pam, almost impatiently. For the carriage had come out on the road she had travelled one early spring day twelve years ago, when, all unconsciously, she had taken the turning that led her to James Peele. And now, in

this dumbly unwilling, protesting way, she was going over the same road.

"Nice fellow, isn't he?"

"Oh yes, *very*."

"And she, poor Lady Henrietta, was delightful. My wife liked her immensely, though they of course had very little in common,—Lady Henrietta being so smart, and all that, and Augusta just—a country bumpkin's wife! I always say we are only country bumpkins,—living all the year round in the country, and going to town only for an occasional visit."

The road had now crept to the top of the gradual hill, and stretched straight ahead, between lightly frosted fields. Against the sky-line, a clump of trees and a chimney; Peele's house.

Pam shivered. So, after all, her struggles had been in vain. Fate's great hand had taken her in its mighty grasp and led her hither.

"Shall I marry him?" she asked herself, miserably; "shall I have the strength to refuse?"

"That's poor Peele's place. Oak Barns, my little place, is just beyond the turning there, to the right. Ah, there's Peele's carriage with the Duchess, just going in,—these nags of mine aren't so bad, after all, are they? The Duchess had at least three and a half minutes' start of us——"

Oak Barns was a modern, villa-like house with a fine wide hall, in which, waiting to receive her guest, Mrs. Baring-Smythe was standing.

She was a red-faced woman with a sensible figure, and

large, red hands. She wore a grey dress trimmed with black lace, and an amethyst cross on a chain round her neck.

Obviously embarrassed, this lady murmured some kind of a greeting to Pam and then hurried her up the stairs.

"I'm sure you'll like some tea and a nap," she said, cordially, but in an evident hurry, opening a door and ushering the girl into a pleasant room; "it's only four, and we don't dine until half-past seven, so you'll have plenty of time for a good rest."

And Pam obediently drank her tea and lay down on a very slippery sofa. To sleep was another matter. She had had but little rest the last two nights, for the Duchess, utterly broken down by the shock of her daughter's death, had clung to her piteously, asking for her every time she left the room, reproaching her for every movement she made. So Pam had sat by the bed where the poor old woman lay, and counted the long hours as the clock on the stairs struck. Lady Henrietta's sister, Lady Maria O'Reilly, had come direct to Torpington, and there was no one to help the Duchess get to where her dead daughter lay, except Pam. "You will come with me, dear,—for Oswald's sake," she had said, and Pam, after a moment's fierce inward struggle, had quietly assented.

So here she was in this strange house, and to-morrow she must go to the funeral. "Das Ende von Lied," kept going through her tired brain, "The End of the Song." She had fought, she had struggled, and now she was beaten, conquered by *force majeure*. That Peele would want her to marry him she knew, and she doubted her force to resist him.

But she also knew that she could not be happy as his wife. He had proved himself a weakling, the unfulfilled promises of his youth lay behind him; he had allowed himself to be beaten in the race; he had failed. And not, she knew, because of his weak heart, but because of some inherent weakness in his nature. "Just a common rush of prosperity to the head," she told herself, with a dreary laugh, as she lay on worthy Mrs. Baring-Smythe's unyielding sofa, watching the firelight play on the gay chintz curtains. "And he is not even *good*. He would have made me bad if I had let him. And yet—when he looks at me—as he used to—what if I couldn't say no? I'd love him and despise him all at once, and be miserable the rest of my days. Oh, well, I'll be miserable if I don't marry him, so what does it matter?"

Dinner was a solemn meal, and Pam was so sleepy that she could hardly keep awake.

Mrs. Baring-Smythe belonged to the order of ladies whose idea of hospitable civility consists in the asking of numerous personal questions—"to show interest." Pam answered these questions mechanically, and swallowed her yawns with her food.

Yes, the Duchess was better to-day. Yes, Pam had known the Duchess nearly all her life. No, she didn't know the Duke. Yes, she knew Mr. Peele. Yes, she found him charming. Yes, it was a terrible tragedy. Yes, she lived in London. In Westminster. Yes, her father was alive. So was her mother. In Japan. No, they never came to England. No, she had no sisters. No, she didn't miss those

sisters she had never had. No, she would not have any more game, thanks.

And so on, and so on, while Mr. Baring-Smythe beamed, and Mrs. Baring-Smythe enquired.

Yes, she was to go to the funeral, of course. No, the Duchess was going with Lady Maria O'Reilly, her other daughter, and Lady Maria's daughter. Yes, Pam would go with Mr. and Mrs. Baring-Smythe, please——

At last Pam found herself in bed, and fell asleep almost at once.

CHAPTER XV

"HER GRACE would like to see you, Miss," whispered the Duchess's maid, as Pam followed Mrs. Baring-Smythe into the house of mourning the next day. Up the metamorphosed stairs the girl crept quietly, vaguely glad that the old place had been improved out of recognition, and through the picture-gallery where Peele had once shown her a picture he loved. It was early, for she had known that the Duchess would wish to see her before they started for the Church.

"How is Her Grace, Honeywell?"

"Very calm, Miss, thank you, and she slept better last night, thank you."

There was an overpowering scent of flowers even in these upper rooms; Pam felt giddy and half sick.

When she reached the Duchess's room she found the old woman sitting before her dressing-table, staring blankly at her own image in the glass. "How are you, my dear? I am better, thank you, but—and I want you to see her. Come."

Pam had braced herself for all sorts of trials that day, but this was an unexpected one. "Do you—do you think Mr. Peele would like it?" she asked.

"Nonsense! And she was fond of you years ago, and only the other day she said that the next time she was in town she was going to see you. Come."

Without a word, Pam followed the Duchess into Lady

Henrietta's morning-room, where the coffin stood. "He will come,—I shall see him now," the girl thought, stiffening her muscles and preparing for the dreaded instant; "I *will* be strong." But he did not come, and she stood looking down at the dead face of the woman she had doubtlessly, though involuntarily, robbed of her happiness. "If he hadn't loved me, he must have loved you," she thought.

Lady Henrietta Shanklin had been in her youth one of the most beautiful women in Europe, and now, in her coffin, a certain air of that youth seemed to have come back to her, so that to Pam, who had not seen her for many years, she looked but little changed since the old days.

"Isn't she exquisite?" whispered the Duchess, wiping her eyes. "And to think that her beauty could not bring her happiness!"

Pam's throat contracted. She was ashamed. All these days she had thought only of herself and of Peele. Now the other side of the shield was presented to her, and she realised in a flash what the life of the other woman had been.

She turned away while the Duchess looked her last at her girl, and then, one arm round the old woman's shoulders, she led her back to the room where Honeywell was waiting to put on her bonnet.

"I—I will go down now," said Pam, kissing the poor old suddenly thin face under its cloud of crape, "and—I must go back by the five o'clock train."

"Yes, my dear. You have been very good to me. Oswald would be glad, if he knew,—perhaps he does," she added,

with one of the pathetically absurd flashes of piety that come to the religionless in times of affliction.

"Yes. And—you are really going to Ireland to-morrow?"

"Maria says I must; I'd much rather go to Berkeley Square, but she says it would be bad for me——"

"Then,—good-bye, dearest Duchess. Please write to me and let me know how you are—and when you are coming back."

The old woman promised, crying weakly as she clung to the girl, and at last Pam was able to get away, and return to the darkened drawing-room, which was half full of black figures.

"How *is* she?" whispered Mrs. Baring-Smythe, huskily. Mrs. Baring-Smythe was weeping, as was quite proper, and her crape smelt strongly of dye.

The slow minutes passed, a clock struck,—too loud in the oppressive stillness. And then in the hall, footsteps and low voices were heard. Someone blew his nose shamelessly, the house-door was opened. The coffin was coming. Pam stood with her eyes fixed on the floor, as the shuffling feet descended the stairs. *He,* she knew, was close behind the heavy burden that had been slim Henrietta Peele. And though she would not look up she could see him, correct, grave, all black but his white face. She heard his footsteps now, and once or twice, on his way to the door, they paused, as someone shook hands with him. Mrs. Baring-Smythe sobbed convulsively, "Poor fellow, just look at him!" But Pam did not look; her eyes were closed as he went out of the door.

Other footsteps followed,—the Duchess, a huge, unwieldy black packet, dragged along by the young Duke, the O'Reillys, a cousin of Peele's, and others whom Pam did not know. Wreaths and flowers followed, apparently an endless flow of odiously strong-scented flowers. Oh, for some air!

Outside, on the frozen gravel, restless horses stamped, and slow wheels crunched. The hearse and the first carriages had started. Henrietta Peele had left her house, and made way—Pam hated Peele, and she hated herself. She would run away to the Continent and hide forever—she would——

Following Mrs. Baring-Smythe into her carriage, she frowned so ferociously that Baring-Smythe, whose spirits had risen at finding himself again, so to speak, under his own roof, feared that he had looked too cheerful, and apologised.

"I'm so infernally sensitive,—felt as if I'd die in there, you know—— Come along, Wilfred, you're to go with us." A young man with staring aquamarine eyes took his place opposite Mrs. Baring-Smythe, and was introduced to Pam by that lady between her loud sniffs.

"George, give me that extra handkerchief, please,—Miss Yeoland, Mr. Belford, my nephew."

Mr. Belford seemed oppressed by a desire to whistle, his red lips constantly puckering and then convulsively straightening under his vis-à-vis' stern eye.

"Poor Peele! I never was so sorry for anyone in my life," remarked Mr. Baring-Smythe, and Pam knew instinctively that he made the same remark about the chief survivor at

every funeral to which he went. "'Looks much broken, don't you think, Wilfred?"

"Oh, awfully. She must have been a st—a great beauty when she was young."

"It's the poor little boy *I* think about," remarked Mrs. Baring-Smythe. "So young, and motherless!"

It was one consolation to Pam that she felt no joy in the prospect of seeing Peele. She knew that her powers of resistance were about over, that when she saw him she could fight no longer, but at least she was not base enough to rejoice in his freedom. She feared, she dreaded him, she scorned her own weakness with a healthy scorn, and even while she recognised her own weakness she was bracing herself for a final struggle.

During the drive to the Church she sat thinking, thinking, trying to make some plan for the immediate future. If, when she saw him, she was obliged to lay down her arms, should she do the conventional thing and go away somewhere, waiting for him to seek her out when the time had come? Or should she stay on in Westminster? Or—which of the two *would* be the conventional thing?

Her head swam. She could no longer think, and things seemed to have been definitely taken out of her hands. If only she had de Lensky to turn to, but she had lost him. She was alone. Feeling as though she must faint, she followed Mrs. Baring-Smythe out of the carriage at the churchyard gate and stood with downcast eyes while the Vicar said, very simply, the most beautiful words of hope ever

written. "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord—and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die——"

In front of her, close to the coffin, stood Peele, she knew, but she did not look at him. What if, as she did so, a shameful happiness should come to her?

For the next few minutes the girl was hardly conscious of her surroundings, and then, as the crowd poured out of the church into the church-yard, she caught Baring-Smythe's eye and pressed her dry handkerchief to her mouth to hide the smile she could not repress. For she recognised him, and knew that this pompous, worthy, country gentleman was none other than the Englishman whose exclamation to his cheerfully disreputable French companion had that evening at Monte Carlo warned her of James Peele's presence!

How funny, how absurd it was. What if she should whisper to him, now, as he stood with his hat pressed to his chest by the grave-side, "How is Fernande?"

"Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not unto the bitter pangs of eternal death. Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts——" Pam started. The secrets of our hearts. What if, suddenly, all these people should know the secret of hers,—of that man's standing she knew in the correct attitude of manfully borne affliction? And then, quite quietly, she realised that she must marry Peele. That she could no longer struggle. That Death itself had conquered her. "I shall be unhappy," she told herself, "and

ashamed of him, and ashamed of loving him, but he will make me marry him. And I shall grow—worse—and that I have tried to be good will not help me. I—give up."

Suddenly some slight movement of someone in front of her caused a break in the black wall of people between her and the grave, and unconsciously looking up, she saw Peele's face.

—"We therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth,—in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection——" But that was not his face. That was the face of a middle-aged man with a reddish nose and ugly lines round his eyes. Where then was James Peele? It was *he* who was chief mourner at this funeral. This man, who stood in Peele's place—he was a weak, inert-looking person, with discontent and self-indulgence and even pomposity written all over him. Bah!

Suddenly the eyes with the lines round them met Pam's, and the face flushed.

Yes, this man was Peele. It was this face that she had so feared seeing,—these eyes she had so dreaded meeting,—and the other man, her Peele, the one who had lived on in her memory, in her heart, was dead.

Her tribute to his memory was a slow, painful, shamed blush that seemed to burn her whole body and quicken her heart-beat. Then she drew a deep breath. She was free. She was a widow, possibly; the man she had loved was dead, —even now the clergyman had buried him, and she must wear mourning for him all her life, but she was free.

"I—am not well," she whispered to young Belford, who

stood next her, as the crowd began to move away from the grave; "would you mind walking home with me?"

Without a word of excuse they stole away, leaving Mrs. Baring-Smythe indignantly astonished, and her husband mildly facetious about young people liking to be together. But Wilfrid Belford never forgot that walk over the iron-bound fields to his uncle's house.

Pam spoke not a word, but flew across the uneven ground like a big black bird. Her face was as white as the frost in the crannies among the clods over which she skipped, but she did not look ill, and her eyes were black with excitement. When she had reached the house she thanked him and rushed upstairs without another word, and when the Baring-Smythes returned they found their peculiar guest at the door with her luggage by her side.

"I must rush back to town," she said, hastily, "and I can just make the express if you will let me have the carriage——" Her good-byes were polite and sufficing, but she offered no explanation for her extraordinary behaviour, and to this day Mrs. Baring-Smythe believes her to have been a little mad.

Pam never could recall one detail of her homeward journey. She was soaring in freedom; chains had dropped from her very soul; the whole world was hers, and she was young again. She was not in the least ashamed of her change of feelings, for to her it was not a change. She had loved a man who no longer existed, that was all. Not because Peele had lost the austere beauty that had been his, nor because he had grown old. These things, she knew, would have

made no difference to her, and truthful as she always was to herself, she admitted without argument, without excuses, without self-laudation, these several facts.

"It is," she told herself, as the train drew into Euston, "simply that he has, since I saw him, grown to be another man. And I do not love that man!"

She recalled Lensky's stare of surprise, when, that day at the Villa, he had read Peele's letter. No wonder he had been amazed!

CHAPTER XVI

"EIGHTY-SEVEN Chimes Lane, Westminster, cabby—"

Ah, this old London! Is there any place in the whole round world like it? When it frowns as well as when it smiles; in its dingiest as well as its gayest quarters; in summer or in winter, it is, to its true lovers, unique and adorable. And Pam was a faithful, indulgent, tender lover, and leaning forward in her hansom, watched the crowded streets with a deep glow in her eyes.

"How shall I *live* now, you old town?" she said to it under her breath,—"now that I am not afraid!"

It was, after all, as much fear as love from which she had suffered; a crippling, unnerving fear. Her immense relief brought to her a glow of love for humanity that reddened her cheeks and shortened her breath. All those people passing in the street interested her; she would have liked to know all their stories, to sympathise with them. To know! After all, that is what counts.

She recalled a verse she had once cut from a newspaper, and learned.

"Life is my lover. I will know his heart,
His mind, his soul, his weakness and his strength.
Study him will I, therefore, till at length,
I know not him from mine own self apart.
Wherefore I look on all he shows to me,
Sights beautiful, sights evil, and sights sad;
For naught in him unworthy is, or bad,

As all he is and has been he *must* be.
His hands are strong and mine are weak and white
Sometimes he grasps mine till they ache and burn,
Yet never from his wide gaze will I turn,
For I must know him in his cruel might.
Sometimes we laugh, sometimes together weep,
And when I know him quite, then can I sleep."

"I will learn,—I will try to *know*," thought the girl, unable to put into words the feeling that possessed her. "And I will try to be useful and good."

She was ashamed of her loss of courage when on the eve of being brought face to face with Peele. After all her struggles to have been so weak!

But now she would waste no more time. She would make of her life something worthy, something beautiful, and she would endeavour in every way to teach the baby, as she grew older, to use the hours as they came, and to appreciate and understand the world in which she lived.

It was a very cold evening and the lights had frosty halos. At Trafalgar Square she burst into a sudden laugh, recalling her talk with Ratty on the steps of the National Gallery. Poor Ratty, she had been very hard on him!

Suddenly up went her umbrella. "Stop, cabby, stop! I want to speak to that gentleman—there, in the long coat. *Jack!*"

Lensky, who was leisurely crossing the street, turned at the sound of her voice. "Jack—I want to speak to you!"

He came obediently to the cab, and then, recognising her, held out his hand.

"How do you do?" he said, politely.

"I—I am very well. I—want to tell you something."

He leaned over the wheel, peering up at her transfigured face. "What has happened?"

"Many things. Get in and go on a little way with me,—I'll set you down where you like——"

But he drew back. "I am very sorry," he murmured, in a conventional tone, "but I cannot."

She flushed. "Oh!—you mean—you will not."

"If you prefer the expression."

His face was absolutely emotionless.

"But—oh, I am so happy, and—I must tell you. You—oh, *please* come," she stammered.

"No. I am glad that you are happy; believe me, I am sincerely glad, but I will not come with you. And now,—you will excuse me——"

He smiled as he again held out his hand, but even his gentle smile was inexorable, and she knew that in another moment he would be gone; she would have lost him forever. And that she could not bear.

Losing all sense of pride, intent only on making good use of this last chance, she said, laying her hand on, not in, his, "Listen; I—I want you. You must come. So many things have happened, everything, my whole life is changed, and—just this once you *must* come."

Resignedly, but with unfailing politeness, he obeyed, and when the hansom had started, said gently, "Well? What has happened?"

She knew that he had come with her only because his code

did not permit him to refuse a woman's pleading, that he hated being with her; that he would at the first possible moment escape. And yet she was happy. She had missed him so atrociously, and now here he was, his imperturbable profile outlined against the dark side of the hansom, his hands clasped on his umbrella.

"I—am so glad to see you," she began, after a pause.

"Thanks."

"And—what has happened is this. I have just come from Lady Henrietta Peele's funeral."

"Yes. I read about her death."

"And—I am so happy!"

He turned, without the slightest change of expression.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that—it is all like a bad dream,—that I have seen him,"—as she spoke the cabman drew up sharply, and a fire-engine roared its way towards them, drowning her voice. When it had passed she went on, nervously, "and—I am cured."

"You mean that—you no longer love him?"

"No. That—I never loved the James Peele whom you knew. *My* James Peele—is dead. Do you understand? He has so changed that he is—a stranger to me. Oh, *please* be glad with me!"

Lensky smiled pleasantly as they turned into the shabby quiet of Westminster. "I am indeed glad; gladder than I can say." As he spoke he made a movement towards signalling the cabman with his umbrella, but Pam caught his arm. "Jack," she burst out, almost incoherently, "you

mustn't go; I can't let you go—I—I missed you too horribly——"

Very gently he drew his arm from her hand. "You must let me get out," he said, "I am glad you are happy, but—I cannot be your friend, and I will not try to be. And, —this is painful."

They had reached Chimes Lane, and in a moment the hansom would stop. "Jack," said Pam, desperately, "will you marry me?"

It was nearly dark here, and he leaned over, vainly trying to see her face. The flower in his coat brushed her cheek.

"What do you mean?" he asked, inevitably.

"I mean it,—indeed I do. I—have missed you so; I have been so lonely,—I want you, I want you!"

There was a long pause, and then he said, quietly, "Loneliness is not enough for—marriage. You remember that day in the Abbey Cloister? I—I am not an old woman, Pam, and—I love you." Her heart was beating wildly as she answered.

"And I love you. I didn't know, because it is—so different, but I *do* love you."

"I shall not be content with—what you give Pilgrim, or the Duchess."

She hesitated, searching for words. Then at last she said, as the cabman, who had passed the house, turned and drew back towards it, "I think—you needn't be afraid. He was first, and—I shall never forget it, but—of all people in the world I love you best, and—you may love me as much as you like. I never thought it would be like—this."

Without a word he took her into his arms, and for the first time kissed her.

"O Lord our God,"

sang Big Ben, though only the cabman heard him,

"Be Thou our Guide,
That by Thy Help
No foot may slide."

Then, as the chimes whirred into silence, and his fares made no move towards getting out, the cabby peered down at them, and after a silent chuckle said, hoarsely, "Aighty-seven, Laidy."

THE END

Popular Copyright Books

AT MODERATE PRICES

Any of the following titles can be bought of your bookseller at the price you paid for this volume

---

The Shepherd of the Hills. By Harold Bell Wright.
Jane Cable. By George Barr McCutcheon.
Abner Daniel. By Will N. Harben.
The Far Horizon. By Lucas Malet.
The Halo. By Bettina von Hutten.
Jerry Junior. By Jean Webster.
The Powers and Maxine. By C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
The Balance of Power. By Arthur Goodrich.
Adventures of Captain Kettle. By Cutcliffe Hyne.
Adventures of Gerard. By A. Conan Doyle.
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. By A. Conan Doyle.
Arms and the Woman. By Harold MacGrath.
Artemus Ward's Works (extra illustrated).
At the Mercy of Tiberius. By Augusta Evans Wilson.
Awakening of Helena Richie. By Margaret Deland.
Battle Ground, The. By Ellen Glasgow.
Belle of Bowling Green, The. By Amelia E. Barr.
Ben Blair. By Will Lillibridge.
Best Man, The. By Harold MacGrath.
Beth Norvell. By Randall Parrish.
Bob Hampton of Placer. By Randall Parrish.
Bob, Son of Battle. By Alfred Ollivant.
Brass Bowl, The. By Louis Joseph Vance.
Brethren, The. By H. Rider Haggard.
Broken Lance, The. By Herbert Quick.
By Wit of Women. By Arthur W. Marchmont.
Call of the Blood, The. By Robert Hitchens.
Cap'n Eri. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Cardigan. By Robert W. Chambers.
Car of Destiny, The. By C. N. and A. N. Williamson.
Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine. By Frank R. Stockton.
Cecilia's Lovers. By Amelia E. Barr.

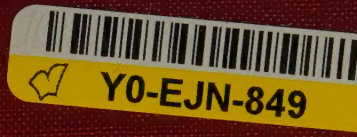
Popular Copyright Books

AT MODERATE PRICES

Any of the following titles can be bought of your bookseller at the price you paid for this volume

---

Circle, The. By Katherine Cecil Thurston (author of "The Masquerader," "The Gambler").
Colonial Free Lance, A. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss.
Conquest of Canaan, The. By Booth Tarkington.
Courier of Fortune, A. By Arthur W. Marchmont.
Darrow Enigma, The. By Melvin Severy.
Deliverance, The. By Ellen Glasgow.
Divine Fire, The. By May Sinclair.
Empire Builders. By Francis Lynde.
Exploits of Brigadier Gerard. By A. Conan Doyle.
Fighting Chance, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
For a Maiden Brave. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss.
For Love or Crown. By Arthur W. Marchmont.
Fugitive Blacksmith, The. By Chas. D. Stewart.
God's Good Man. By Marie Corelli.
Heart's Highway, The. By Mary E. Wilkins.
Holladay Case, The. By Burton Egbert Stevenson.
Hurricane Island. By H. B. Marriott Watson.
In Defiance of the King. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss.
Indifference of Juliet, The. By Grace S. Richmond.
Infelice. By Augusta Evans Wilson.
In the Name of a Woman. By Arthur W. Marchmont.
Lady Betty Across the Water. By C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
Lady of the Mount, The. By Frederic S. Isham.
Lane That Had No Turning, The. By Gilbert Parker.
Langford of the Three Bars. By Kate and Virgil D. Boyles.
Last Trail, The. By Zane Grey.
Leavenworth Case, The. By Anna Katharine Green.
Lilac Sunbonnet, The. By S. R. Crockett.
Lin McLean. By Owen Wister.
Long Night, The. By Stanley J. Weyman.
Maid at Arms, The. By Robert W. Chambers.


Y0-EJN-849